



USAID's Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-Management Activity

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT



September 2023

**Strengthening Inclusive Development of Chittagong Hill Tracts, UNDP
A Project of the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs**

Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-Management Activity (CHTWCA)

Final Evaluation Report

Author:

Mohammed Jashimuddin, PhD
Professor, Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences
University of Chittagong, Chattogram 4331, Bangladesh

Cover Photo:

Courtesy of CHTWCA staff. The photo features a meeting of the Village Common Forest Management committee at Kutupchari Para VCF, Belaichari Upazila, Rangamati.

September 2023

DISCLAIMER

This material is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this material are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government to identify parties responsible for the contents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many people volunteered their time, knowledge, experiences, and views to support this evaluation and provided valuable comments to the evaluation team. Several contributors from different levels contributed in-depth inputs to the evaluation. Specifically, the team wishes to express their heartfelt gratitude to the concerned personnel of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-Management Activity (CHTWCA), representatives of SID-CHT, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The final evaluation process was very smooth and productive; thanks very much to all representatives of implementing partners of CHTWCA - Rangamati Hill District Council (RHDC), Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC), Khagrachari Hill District Council (KHDC), Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha, TAHZINGDONG, ASHIKA Development Associates, CHT (South) Forest Division, CHT (North) Forest Division, Bandarban Forest Division and Lama Forest Division for contributing their ideas and suggestions including local perspective.

The study team mainly thanks Dr. Ram Sharma, Chief Technical Advisor, SID-CHT of UNDP, Mr. Shareful Hassan, PMR Team Leader, PMR of SID-CHT Office, Mr. Maung Hla Myant, Natural Resource Management Officer, SID-CHT, UNDP, Mr. Rhitwik Roy Chowdhury, Budget Expert, SID-CHT, UNDP, Mr. Md. Zahirul Islam, Communication Officer, SID-CHT, UNDP, Mr. Sadananda Chakma, Programme Associate, SID-CHT, CHTDF, UNDP, and Mr. Imranul Islam, Geographic Information Officer, SID-CHT, UNDP for their valuable feedback and guidance.

The field team, composed of two research assistants, Mr. Md. Jaiarul Arefin Chowdhury and Mr. Md. Imran Hossain, was committed and trained adequately to overcome all the odds in the field realities and complete their tasks. I am grateful to them for the commendable work done with utmost sincerity, ensuring the quality. Most importantly, the final evaluation consultant of CHTWCA extends his heartfelt gratitude to all of the respondents who contributed their valuable time to ensure the evaluation's success.

On Behalf of the Final Evaluation Study

Prof. Dr. Mohammed Jashimuddin

PROJECT AND EVALUATION INFORMATION DETAILS

A. Project Information

Project Title	Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-Management Activity (CHTWCA)	
Atlas ID	00094988	
Corporate Outcome and Output	<p>Country Programme Document (CPD) Output 2.1: More people in Bangladesh, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, have increased capacities, knowledge, and skills to adopt sustainable consumption behaviours and lead in climate action.</p> <p>Strategic Plan (SP): Output 4.1: Natural resources protected and managed to enhance sustainable productivity and livelihoods</p> <p>United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF): Output 3.1: All people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, benefit from healthier ecosystems have fair access to necessary resources (resilient infrastructure and basic services, information, finance, capacity, and technology) and are empowered to adopt sustainable consumption behaviours and lead in climate action.</p>	
Country	Bangladesh	
Region	Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachari Hill Districts of Bangladesh	
Date Project Document Signed	30 August 2013	
Project Dates	Start	Planned End
	30 August 2013	31 December 2023
Project Budget	USD 14,002,800	
Project Expenditure	USD 14,002,800	
Funding Source	USAID	
Implementing Party	Rangamati Hill District Council, Bandarban Hill District Council, Khagrachari Hill District Council, CHT (South) Forest Division, CHT (North) Forest Division, Bandarban Forest Division, Lama Forest Division, Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha, TAHZINGDONG, ASHIKA Development Associates, local forest-dependent people, and traditional institutions and leaders (Circle Chiefs, Headmen and Karbaries)	

B. Final Evaluation Information

Evaluation Type (project/ outcome/ thematic/country programme etc.)	Project	
Final/midterm review/other	Final Evaluation	
Period under Evaluation	21 days	
Evaluators	Individual Consultant	
Evaluator's Email Address	mjashimuddin2001@yahoo.co.uk	
Evaluation Dates	Start	Completion
	August 2023	October 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	3
PROJECT AND EVALUATION INFORMATION DETAILS	4
A. Project Information	4
B. Final Evaluation Information.....	4
LIST OF TABLES	7
LIST OF FIGURES.....	7
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	8
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	10
CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION & DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION	15
1.1 Understanding of the Project	15
1.1.1 Background and Rationale.....	15
1.1.2 Brief on Project Profile.....	15
1.2 Project Information.....	17
1.3 Project Location	17
1.4 The Structure of Report	17
1.5 Description of the Intervention	18
CHAPTER 2 : EVALUATION SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES.....	19
2.1 Evaluability Analysis	19
2.2 Final Evaluation Information	19
2.3 Purpose	19
2.4 Specific Objectives	19
2.5 Scope of Evaluation.....	20
CHAPTER 3 : EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY	21
3.1 Approach.....	21
3.2 Overall Methodology.....	21
3.3 Evaluation Criteria and Key Guiding Questions	21
3.3.1 Evaluation Questions.....	21
3.3.2 Gender and Human Rights-based Approach.....	23
3.4 Evaluation Methodology and Approach.....	23
3.4.1 Proposed Methodology	23
3.4.2 Data collection strategies	24
3.4.3 Data analysis and presentation:	25
3.5 Evaluation Ethics	25
3.6. Evaluation Matrix.....	25
CHAPTER 4 : FINDINGS	26
4.1 Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Coherence, Impact, Sustainability, Gender Equality, Human Rights, Leave No One Behind	26
4.1.1 Relevance.....	26
4.1.2 Effectiveness	27
4.1.3 Efficiency.....	35
4.1.4 Coherence.....	37
4.1.5 Impact.....	39
4.1.6 Sustainability	40
4.1.7 Gender Equality and Human Rights.....	42
4.1.8 Leave No One Behind.....	44
4.1.9 Risks regarding legal frameworks, policies, governance structures, and processes	45
4.2 Findings from FGD Responses with Implications to strengthened ecosystem governance, resilient livelihoods and conflict resolution for enhanced social cohesion	46
4.2.1 VCF Communities	46
4.2.2 Local Volunteer Mediator Forums (LVMFs).....	47

4.3 Final Project Achievements.....	47
4.4 Case Studies.....	50
4.4.1 Nomor Jib Chakma's Inspiring Journey: From Water Scarcity to Prosperity.....	50
CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS	52
5.1 Conclusion.....	52
5.2 Recommendations.....	52
CHAPTER 6 : INSIGHTS ON THE THEORY OF CHANGE & LESSON LEARNED	54
6.1 Insights on the Theory of Change	54
6.2 Lesson Learned	55
ANNEXES	56
ANNEX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCES.....	56
ANNEX 2: DETAILED MATRIX FOR FINAL EVALUATION OF CHTWCA.....	73
ANNEX 3: CHTWCA RESULTS FRAMEWORK WITH BASELINE, TARGETS AND ACHIEVEMENTS (Adapted from PDT, Year 10)	80
ANNEX 4: TOTAL ESTIMATED BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE OF CHTWCA (Source: CHTWCA Project Office)	83
ANNEX 5: LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED.....	84
ANNEX 6: LIST OF RESPONDENTS	84
6A. List of KII Respondents	84
6B. FGD at the Field Level	84
6C. IDIs Respondents List:.....	85
ANNEX 7: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS, INTERVIEW GUIDES.....	86
Tool 1: In-depth Interviews.....	86
Tool 2: Key Informant Interview.....	88
Tool 3: Focus Group Discussion Questions	92
Tool 4: Case Studies/Success Stories Guidelines	94
ANNEX 8: THE PLEDGE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT IN THE EVALUATION.....	96

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1.1: GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE OF THE PROJECT	17
TABLE 4.1: RELEVANCE OF CHTWCA.....	27
TABLE 4.2: EFFECTIVENESS OF CHTWCA.....	29
TABLE 4.3: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY THEIR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHTWCA.....	31
TABLE 4.4: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY TYPE OF TRAINING OR SUPPORT RECEIVED FROM CHTWCA ..	32
TABLE 4.5: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' OPINION ON IMPROVED MARKET ACCESS AND SATISFACTION ON CHTWCA.....	32
TABLE 4.6: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' PLANNED LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS TO CONTINUE	35
TABLE 4.7: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON THE CHALLENGES THEY HAVE FACED DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHTWCA	35
TABLE 4.8: SUMMARY OF BUDGET ALLOCATION AND EXPENDITURE FROM 16 JAN 2020 - 31 DEC 2023	37
TABLE 4.9: EFFICIENCY OF CHTWCA	37
TABLE 4.10: COHERENCE OF CHTWCA.....	38
TABLE 4.11: IMPACT OF CHTWCA.....	40
TABLE 4.12: SUSTAINABILITY OF CHTWCA.....	41
TABLE 4.13: GENDER RESPONSIVENESS OF CHTWCA INTERVENTIONS.....	43
TABLE 4.14: GENDER EQUALITY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND OF CHTWCA.....	45
TABLE 4.15: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF CHTWCA ACCORDING TO MAIN RESULTS.....	49

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 3.1: APPROACH OF THE ASSIGNMENT.....	21
FIGURE 4.1: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON RELEVANCE, EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF CHTWCA.....	32
FIGURE 4.2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT OR TRAINING CHTWCA TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVELIHOOD FROM CHTWCA.....	33
FIGURE 4.3: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS TO PUT IN PRACTICE THE TRAININGS RECEIVED FROM CHTWCA	33
FIGURE 4.4: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT SYSTEM FROM CHTWCA.....	34
FIGURE 4.5: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF CHTWCA OUTPUT AND OUTCOME.....	34
FIGURE 4.6: MAP OF THE CHT SHOWING CHTWCA PROJECT SITES	48
FIGURE 4.7: NOMOR JIB CHAKMA IN HIS HOME GARDEN	50
FIGURE 4.8: NOMOR JIB CHAKMA WITH HIS GOATS AND HENS	51

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIGAs	Alternative Income Generating Activities
ANR	Assisted Natural Regeneration
APR	Annual Progress Report
BFD	Bangladesh Forest Department
BHDC	Bandarban Hill District Council
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CHTDF	Chittagong Hill Tract Development Facility
CHTRC	Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council
CHTWCA	Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-Management Activity
CMC	Co-management Committee
CPD	Country Programme Document
CPG	Community Patrol Group
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DC	Deputy Commissioner
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSO	Forest Settlement Officer
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GIS	Geographic Information System
HDCs	Hill District Councils
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
ICS	Improved Cook Stove
IDIs	In-Depth Interviews
IRs	Interim Results
IWMP	Integrated Watershed Management Plan
KHDC	Khagrachari Hill District Council
KII	Key Informants Interviews
LNOB	Leaving no one behind
LOAs	Letters of Agreements
LVMFs	Local Volunteer Mediators Forums
MOCHTA	Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs
MOEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MIS	Management Information System
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
NID	National Identity Card
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAs	Protected Areas
PDT	Performance Data Table
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
PNGOs	Partner Non-Government Organizations
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and foster conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks
RFs	Reserved Forests
RHDC	Rangamati Hill District Council
RO	Range Officer
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

SID-CHT	Strengthening Inclusive Development in Chittagong Hill Tracts
SP	Strategic Priority
TA/DA	Travel Allowance/Daily Allowance
TAPP	Technical Assistance Project Proforma
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UP	Union Parishad
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
USG	United States Government
VCFs	Village Common Forests
VConF	Village Conservation Forum

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The project titled “Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-Management Activity (CHTWCA),” funded by USAID and implemented by UNDP under the Strengthening Inclusive Development in CHT (SID-CHT) Project, aims at integrated ecosystem management of forests (headwater Reserved Forests, Protected Areas and Village Common Forests) and their associated micro-watersheds. The project’s main goal is to strengthen gender-responsive local resilience through an integrated ecosystem management approach of the CHT, while the purpose is to sustain the capacity to protect and manage the natural ecosystems of the CHT. A strong focus was given to building public-private partnerships through government and non-government partners for CHTWCA implementation. Social cohesion is focused through the prevention and resolution of conflicts, improved environmental governance and NRM, and support to local communities to organize themselves through their capacity and institution building and empowerment.
2. The purpose of the final evaluation was to assess the process and progress of the CHTWCA (hereafter referred to as the project) under the SID-CHT so far compared to its targets set in the results framework. The final evaluation also evaluated the project activities' relevance, efficiencies, effectiveness, impact, coherence, and sustainability to understand and make adjustments required in future, if needed. This was based on an OECD model of evaluation. The other three UNDP criteria used for the evaluation included gender equality, human rights and leaving no one behind.
3. The evaluation was carried out in a mixed method using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Information was collected through the survey methods, Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), and in-depth interviews. The evaluation was carried out on the basis of a combined OECD and UNDP framework, a brief account of which has been provided as follows.

Key Findings from the Evaluation

Relevance

4. UNDP follows strategies based on human rights, with the inclusivity principle that no one should be left behind. It acknowledges the multidimensionality of inequalities and exclusion, which largely victimizes weak and disadvantaged groups of the community, including women, the poor, youth, etc.
5. In keeping with its global and national development strategies for Bangladesh, the project was couched within a more extensive UNDP-initiated integrated development intervention titled Strengthening Inclusive Development in Chittagong Hill Tracts (SID-CHT) Project.
6. The objectives and the contents of the project are also consistent with the broader overarching policies and strategies such as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 (no poverty), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 15 (life on earth).
7. The final evaluation results show that most of the key informants, those who were directly involved in the implementation of the project, are in high to a very high agreement that the design and implementation approach of the project are relevant to the current CHT contexts, including both national context and local conditions of the project intervention areas, relevance of the project to UNDP strategies, proposed methodology was relevant for obtaining desired results, human resource development and gender equality. However, they showed moderate agreement towards the human rights-based approach and leaving no one behind.

Effectiveness

8. The project targeted communities living in and around headwater RFs and micro-watersheds of the CHT, the project tried to support community people with capacity development for strengthened ecosystem governance, making them aware of climate change, biodiversity, forest and micro-watershed conservation, resilient livelihood options and improved market access, and resolving social conflicts for improved social cohesion.

9. The project has given due importance to the equity and inclusivity aspects in addition to gender sensitivity focused on women. The project covered all the major ethnic groups to the extent possible.
10. Most of the key persons involved in implementing the project were in moderate to high agreement that the project is on track so far in achieving its planned outcomes and outputs as per the approved result framework and as such effectively managed so far.
11. The updated result framework depicts that out of 18 indicators, 15 show more than 100% achievements and remaining 3 show less than 100% achievements with an overall average of 130% achievements.
12. All of the respondent beneficiaries mentioned that they think project interventions are relevant, efficient and effective for meeting the needs of the people, community, biodiversity, forests, watersheds and as well as for their personal needs.
13. The beneficiaries opined that they are now well aware of the project objectives in building their capacity through different training, enabling them to be economically stable, making them aware of biodiversity and climate change, and restore VCF in helping them to conserve water for dry season.

Efficiency

14. Project management was somewhat challenging due to the multi-ethnic complex environment, remoteness and poor accessibility of the CHT. However, UNDP's institutional capacity to manage projects and its ability to design M&E system enabled the project to compensate for some of these challenges.
15. The analyses of the project's financial details have shown that the approved budget was spent well by following the approved budget guidelines of USAID and UNDP. The total approved budget of USD 14 million is expected to be spent in full by 31 December 2023 showing an efficient utilization.
16. Key informant interviews suggest that the project's field activities were implemented efficiently. However, time constraints, complex system of fund disbursement, remoteness, scattered target groups, lack of logistic support etc., are some of the critical factors responsible for facing difficulties in field implementation of the project. The key informants' interviews also resulted in high agreement that the project efficiently spent the available budget as per the project documents.
17. Considering all the interventions, supporting arrangements and status of achievements of all 18 Indicators as per the result framework, the evaluation concludes that the project has been implemented efficiently.

Coherence

18. The CHT still lags in receiving different essential human rights support compared to other districts in Bangladesh due to remoteness, inaccessibility, internal conflicts, etc. As a result, the extended government-supported social safety net programmes could not cover whole of CHT. So, most people still depend on natural resources, such as forests, waters, land, etc., for their subsistence.
19. The project follows UNDP's strategy under SID-CHT to strengthen the CHT population's capacity to shape and make decisions that affect their lives. The project is aligned with the GOB's Eighth Five-Year Plan and other national planning documents and supports the implementation of the CHT Accord (MEL Plan, 2020).
20. The final evaluation result suggests that there is moderate to high agreement among the key informants interviewed regarding government policies and priorities that relate to enhancing the outcome and output of the project, the project fits the prevailing political, social, economic and environmental challenges of the project locations.
21. There are many government policies and strategies that fit with the project, including the CHT Accord 1997, the Hill District Council Acts 1989, the CHT Regulation 1900, the Forest Act 1927, the Bangladesh Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act 2012 etc. However, due to the differences in the socio-political contexts of the CHT as compared to the plainland districts, some of the laws, policies, or regulations are not coherent and so require revisions for full functionality.

Impact

22. It is too early to reflect on the impact. However, the respondent key persons are in high agreement (81%) that the project created changes that matters to people, and all of them (100%) agreed that the intervention caused a significant positive change in the lives of the intended beneficiaries.
23. The output level results suggested that the project has brought on positive changes in the lives of the people and their communities. A common theme has emerged from the qualitative findings in this study that the acute water crisis in the targeted communities has largely been solved by the project intervention.
24. Capacity building, awareness creation, monetary support to start livelihood, women empowerment (gender balance, karate training etc.), water security (access to water), market creation, etc. are some of the interventions that caused a significant change in the lives of the intended beneficiaries.
25. The results suggest that intended target groups, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, did benefit from the interventions.

Sustainability

26. The capacity developed by the project for the communities and institutions will sustain the project results, and as such people, community and the ecosystem will be benefited in the future.
27. The key persons interviewed were in high agreement that the project interventions contribute towards sustaining the results achieved by the project, the project has documented lessons learned by holding regional and national workshops to inform the project of needful change, and the probability of the benefits of the interventions under CHTWCA will continue in the long term.
28. All the respondent beneficiaries mentioned that the project interventions would be sustainable in the future. Demarcation of RFs, revision of land leasing policy, land tenure security, creation of AIGAs, increase social safety net programmes, women empowerment, conflict mitigation, consultation at the root level, interdepartmental coordination, buffer area identification, creation of eco-tourism spots, CMC and CPG formation, school level activities on climate change, biodiversity, natural resources etc., intensive in-house training, food security, wildlife conservation etc. are some of the potential areas to support for the sustainability of the project impacts.

Gender Equality & Human Rights

29. The project interventions supported gender equality and human rights by selecting 40-50% women as beneficiaries of the project to train them with livelihood skills, providing livelihood supports, make them aware of climate change, forest and biodiversity conservation, fight against any human rights violation, be part of VCF management and other community groups for self-reliance, and raise their voices to get dignified roles in the society. At least one-third of the membership of VCF management committees comprises women as part of written guidelines.
30. It is evident from the updated result framework that CHTWCA focused on gender-responsive in all its interventions implemented by different partners. Women were given due preference in different activities of the project with a range between 33-53% of the total beneficiaries.
31. The key informants interviewed are in high to very high agreement that the activities of the project are adopting a gender-responsive approach and making gender equality an integral part of the project. However, when asked about human rights issues, the respondents were in moderate to high agreement that the project design and implementation has taken the human rights-based approach (HRBA) into account. They were also in low to moderate agreement that poor, indigenous, and physically challenged girls and women and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups have benefited from the project.

Leave No One Behind

32. The project in principle, seeks to ensure no one is left behind. Having stated that the project has limited resources, therefore the project cannot reach everyone for practical reasons. However, the project has attempted to ensure that no poor people, particularly the women from the marginalized population, be excluded from being selected as project beneficiaries.

33. All respondents are in moderate to high agreement that the project's response and recovery initiative(s) have been inclusive in supporting the most vulnerable and marginalized group in the implementing area. At the same time, they were also in high agreement that the project helps to eradicate poverty, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole.

Key Achievements of CHTWCA

Key achievements of the project show that most of the indicators set by the result framework resulted in more than expected. According to the project reports and lessons learned documents, key achievements of the project include:

34. Stopping forestland loss in 226 VCFs (12,773 ha); headwater RFs (4,445 ha) brought into improved management; preparing management plans for 3 Protected Areas (PAs) covering 49,883 ha; distributing 960,000 seedlings to households and institutions; preparing CHT REDD+ Sub National Plan, and CHT REDD+ Safeguards and Safeguards Management System;
35. Assessment and implementation of value chain (Aarong, Grameen Phone-Future Nations, SAPLING etc.) for fisheries, tree nurseries, honey and other non-timber products, and weaving;
36. Training of BFD, HDCs and community members, supporting resilient livelihoods to 247,411 local people;
37. Providing water access to 11,140 local people through 144 GFS, 179 local people receiving GBV support; 795 local conflicts resolved through LVMFs; 180 girls trained in martial arts to increase self-confidence and strength.

Recommendations

Important recommendations include:

38. The Government should take necessary steps for the full implementation of the CHT Accord 1997 and empowering different institutions (CHTRC, HDCs etc.) through democratic elections, activating Land Commission to resolve all land-related disputes; extending government sponsored social safety net programmes all over the CHT; appointing Forest Settlement Officers (FSOs) by the Deputy Commissioners in three Hill Districts as per the existing laws to settle all land-related disputes or conflicts between BFD and local communities; mainstreaming and acknowledging VCFs by the HDCs as mandated by the Hill District Council Acts 1989 for legal support.
39. The Government should also take necessary steps to reform Forest Act 1927 to make it more people-friendly and with the provision to de-reserve RFs where human settlements have received state recognition by the establishment of Union Parishad (UP), no new declaration of RFs should be made in the CHT, encroachment of RFs and PAs (for settlement, jhum, business, tourism etc.) should be strictly prohibited, and RFs and PAs lands shouldn't be leased in any circumstances in the name of development;
40. UNDP country office should organize policy dialogue at the national levels to review conflicting laws, policies, regulations and suggest revisions that suit CHT situations; should secure external fundings to support project-based activities in the CHT; and should liaise with different government institutions working in the CHT to create a congenial environment for the project and for the wellbeing of the people, the community and the environment.
41. The project should include local leaders in the stakeholder list (Chairman, Member, Headman, Karbari etc.), consult people at the root-level first before involving them in any development or conservation activity, and giving priority to women, widows, old people, poor, disadvantaged groups, youths etc.
42. The project may extend livelihood trainings to cover more AIGAs, increase cash support to buy at least a cow, extend GBV support in Rangamati and Khagrachari along with Bandarban to reach all victims, introduce payment for ecosystem services (PES) technique to encourage community people to conserve forests (VCFs, RFs, PAs etc.) using REDD+ or other means, bringing forest-dependent people under cash or food assistance during draught season by the project
43. The project may continue ANR system in RFs and PAs with the provision of employing 'Watcher' and increasing logistic support like motorbike, speed boat, fuel, TA/DA etc. by the project

44. The project may support ecotourism development in RFs and PAs with the help of BFD involving local community people to support conservation, local people and their culture as well as in traditional lands (e.g., USFs) with the help of HDCs and Circles
45. The project may support academic research on sustainable jhum and agriculture, ecotourism development, land use zoning, forest carbon measurement, REDD+, assessment of payment for ecosystem services (PES) etc. to devise new and improved tools and interventions.

Insights on the Theory of Change

46. CHTWCA's theory of change or development hypothesis states that if local communities are capacitated to improve the governance of natural resources in the CHT through an integrated management and gender-sensitive approach, then the resilience of natural ecosystems and communities will improve and the potential for conflict will reduce. For this, a set of activities were implemented in identified watersheds in partnerships with the CHT institutions, leaders and communities, and government agencies to address a series of short, medium and long-term issues related to governance of natural resources.
47. The decision-makers at the policy and strategic levels acknowledge the significance of linking the capacity development of communities and institutions with strengthened ecosystem governance, providing resilient livelihoods with improved market access, reducing conflicts and improving social cohesion to conserve degraded watersheds and headwater RFs for better ecosystem services (water security, livelihoods etc.).
48. With different skill development training, awareness creation activities, livelihood support, community mobilization (e.g., group formation) and conflict resolution (such as, boundary demarcation, GBV, conflicts between groups or communities etc.), the community people are now more confident to manage their degraded watersheds and forests better, earn their livelihoods from several income generating activities and thereby reducing their dependency on the natural resources (mainly forests).
49. In addition, the effort towards organizing communities to create awareness against gender-based violence and to take measures for prevention and for acting against the perpetrators through legal means has created a sense of community-based collective empowerment among women, girls and other disadvantaged groups in the society.

Lessons Learned

Key lessons learned are as follows:

50. Participatory ecosystem restoration is possible for providing water security in the CHT (policy makers, UNDP, communities);
51. Restoration of degrading forest micro-watersheds regenerates encompassing water bodies and aquifer (policy makers, UNDP, communities);
52. Active involvement of local people in participatory forest restoration is critical, and consultation at the root level is necessary (CHTWCA implementing authority);
53. Trust building will reduce the gaps between communities and BFD (implementing partners);
54. Post-conflict situation, multi-institutions and responsibilities, poverty and unemployment, over-dependence on land-based resources, unclear land-tenures, poor communication should be given priority in the CHT (policy makers, UNDP);
55. Community mobilization (such as, group formation, school based or social groups), capacity development, and livelihood support have created a working environment that made people more confident and fearless (CHTWCA implementing authority);
56. Need training on more livelihood options, as per the local demand, such as, cattle farming, skill development on computer, driving, mobile, electrical and electronics, marketing strategy etc. (UNDP)

CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION & DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

I.1 Understanding of the Project

I.1.1 Background and Rationale

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), located in southeast Bangladesh, comprise the three Hill districts - Bandarban, Khagrachari, and Rangamati. The region is home to 12 ethnic groups besides Bengali and has a population of 1.8 million. Each of the ethnic groups retains a unique language, culture, and tradition. The CHT is geographically distinct from most parts of plain land Bangladesh, characterized by steep, rugged, hilly terrain and diversity. USAID-funded Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-Management Activity (CHTWCA), implemented by UNDP under the Strengthening Inclusive Development in CHT (SID-CHT) Project, aims at integrated ecosystem management of forests (headwater Reserved Forests, Protected Areas and Village Common Forests/*mauza* reserves) and their associated micro-watersheds. The project's primary goal is to strengthen gender-responsive local resilience through an integrated ecosystem management approach of the CHT, while the purpose is to sustain the capacity to protect and manage the natural ecosystems of the CHT. The main goal and objective of the project have been implemented through three Expected results, as follows:

- Result 1 (split into 3 IRs): Strengthened Ecosystem Governance
- Result 2 (split into 3 IRs): Resilient Livelihoods with Market Access Improved
- Result 3 (split into 2 IRs): Reduced Conflicts and Improved Social Cohesion among Communities for Ecosystem Conservation

CHTWCA is an activity of the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MOCHTA) and is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for its implementation by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the Strengthening Inclusive Development in CHT (SID-CHT) Project. Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD) of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MOEFCC) and the three Hill District Councils (HDCs) are the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) implementation partners in addition to three Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). Other key CHT institutions with which CHTWCA is working include: CHT Regional Council (CHTRC); three Circles (Bohmong, Mong and Chakma Circles) and their subordinate traditional institutions, including Headmen and Karbaris, and other government and non-government partners, including local NGOs and civil society.

I.1.2 Brief on Project Profile

USAID Bangladesh has been an active partner in planning and implementing development programs in line with the GOB development goals and objectives. The GOB is presently implementing the Seventh Five Year Plan (2016-20), which stipulates, "Chittagong Hill Tracts (is one of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable regions in the country in terms of almost all major development indicators, such as income, employment, poverty, health, water, sanitation, education, women employment, access to infrastructure and national building institutions, inter-community confidence, etc." As per the approved MEL plan, absolute and extreme poverty prevalence among ethnic/tribal communities is above the national average (65% and 44%, respectively). The skills required to move from subsistence livelihood practices to a market economy are hindered by an apparent lack of public policies and investment in sustainable development.

The goal of the SID-CHT is to strengthen the capacity of the population in the CHT to shape and make decisions that impact on their lives. The project is aligned with the GOB's Seventh Five-Year Plan and other national planning documents and supports the implementation of the CHT Peace Accord. The main purpose of the SID-CHT project is: Citizen expectations for voice, development and accountability are met by strengthened institutions to deliver universal access to basic services. It addresses Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 16. The SID-CHT has three objectives: i) to strengthen community land, resource and livelihood management, ii) to increase participation and influence to shape decision-making, and iii) to strengthen democratic governance with responsive institutions and effective services.

CHTWCA is contributing in meeting the above-stated SID-CHT objectives. Improved participatory management of Village Common Forests (VCFs), Protected Areas (PAs) and headwater Reserved Forests (RFs), as being achieved under CHTWCA under Result 1, is contributing in strengthening community-based management of VCFs and their associated watersheds, and participatory forest management in the activity PAs and headwater RFs and their associated watersheds. Improved resilient livelihoods as implemented under Result 2 in the villages/paras located in and around the activity RFs, PAs and VCFs contributes to income generation of local people and thereby reduces community dependency on nearby forests for exploitative and unsustainable harvesting of forest produce. Under Result 3 social cohesion, reduced conflicts and participatory management of VCFs, PAs and RFs in partnerships of the CHT institutions, leaders and communities is strengthening democratic governance with increased peoples' participation and shared decision-making on natural resource management in the CHT.

CHTWCA approach was designed to integrate various ecosystems and human systems - headwater Reserved Forests (RFs), Protected Areas (PAs) and wildlife habitats, Village Common Forests (VCFs), encompassing waterbodies, and paras/villages and forest-dependent people – and will result in capacitated CHT institutions and communities, and improved ecosystems covering nearly 59,883 ha with reduced conflicts, enhanced social cohesion and co-benefits to approximately 322,700 rural people. This technical approach for the CHT focused on building synergies across and strengthening integrated ecosystem management, reduced conflicts, enhanced social cohesion, resilient livelihoods with market access, gender integration, and decision-making voice and capacity of the CHT institutions and community on natural resources management (NRM). A strong focus is given on building public-private partnerships through government and non-government partners for CHTWCA implementation. Social cohesion is focused prevention and resolution of conflicts, improved environmental governance and NRM, and support local communities to organize themselves through their capacity and institution building and empowerment.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) area of Bangladesh's Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachari hill districts encompass all 121 Unions of 26 Upazilas where the project was carried out to achieve the following goal, purpose, results and interim results:

CHTWCA Goal: Strengthened gender-responsive local resilience through an integrated ecosystem management approach of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

CHTWCA Purpose: Sustained capacity to protect and manage the natural ecosystems of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

I. Strengthened ecosystem governance

I.I. Enhanced legal and policy framework for integrated ecosystem management

- 1.2.Improved local capacity for ecosystem management
- 1.3.Ecosystems restored and protected through collaborative management
- 2. Resilient livelihoods with market access improved**
 - 2.1.Sustainable livelihoods options improved with viable market linkage
 - 2.2.Enhanced knowledge of resilient livelihoods
 - 2.3.Public-private partnerships formed for sustained resilient livelihoods
- 3. Reduced conflicts and improved social cohesion among communities for ecosystem governance**
 - 3.1.Enhanced stakeholders’ participation for reducing conflicts and improving social cohesion
 - 3.2. Strengthened conservation communication for reducing conflicts and building conservation awareness amongst key stakeholders

1.2 Project Information

Project Title	Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-Management Activity (CHTWCA)		
Region	Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachari Hill Districts of Bangladesh		
Date of Project Document Signed	August 30, 2013		
Project Dates	Start August 30, 2013	Planned End December 31, 2023	
Funding Source	USAID		
Implementing Party	Rangamati Hill District Council (RHDC), Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC), Khagrachari Hill District Council (KHDC), CHT (South) Forest Division, CHT (North) Forest Division, Bandarban Forest Division, Lama Forest Division, Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha, TAHZINGDONG, ASHIKA Development Associates, and traditional institutions and leaders (Circle chiefs, Headmen and Karbaries)		

1.3 Project Location

The geographical coverage of the evaluation is 121 UPs of 26 Upazilas under 03 CHT districts.

Table 1.1: Geographical coverage of the project

Requirement	District	Upazila	Union	Mauja	Village
Final Evaluation of the CHTWCA Project	Rangamati	26	121		
	Bandarban				
	Khagrachari				

1.4 The Structure of Report

The report consists of introductory chapter, description of the intervention, evaluation scope and objectives, evaluation approach and methodology, findings, the theory of change and lessons learned, and conclusions and recommendations.

I.5 Description of the Intervention

Project Dimensions	Explanation
What was evaluated	The degree to which the CHTWCA has been able to integrate various ecosystems and human systems - headwater Reserved Forests (RFs), Protected Areas (PAs) and wildlife habitats, Village Common Forests (VCFs), encompassing waterbodies, and paras/villages and forest-dependent people, and resulted in capacitated CHT institutions and communities, and improved ecosystems.
Expected Result	To verify to what extent the project has achieved the expected outcome by fulfilling the outputs and outcomes with specific indicators specified in the Result Framework.
National Priorities	The CHTWCA is linked to Strategies 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the UNSDCF, which deals with the capacity development of institutions and communities, improved and resilient environment, participatory governance of natural resources, and gender equality, gender-based violence and human development. Furthermore, it is aligned with the national skills development policy and other relevant national and international policy documents.
Change	The CHTWCA through its multi stakeholder engagement has taken an integrated ecosystem and gender-sensitive approach. As a result, has managed to improve the resilience of the natural ecosystems and communities and to reduce the potential for conflicts.
Key Partners	The project was implemented through multistakeholder engagement. They have provided supporting and facilitating role both at the district level planning and implementation and at community level. Key partners included the CHT institutions (Circles, Headmen, Karbaries etc.) and communities (VCF and stream-dependent communities), and GOB ministries and agencies including BFD and the three Hill District Councils
Specific Social Group	Forest-dependent communities in and around VCFs, headwater RFs and PAs as well as disadvantaged groups in the communities including women and girls
Scale of the intervention	The intervention will result in capacitated CHT institutions and communities, improved ecosystems covering nearly 59,883 ha with reduced conflicts, enhanced social cohesion and co-benefits to 322,700 rural people.
The total resources	USD 14,002,800
The context	Chittagong Hill Tracts has been historically mired with sociopolitical unrest and identity politics based on ethnicity. The hilly nature of the terrain makes the area rather inhospitable and difficult for any development intervention.
Design weakness	While the project takes an integrated approach it lacks provision for post training support and job placement.

CHAPTER 2 : EVALUATION SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Evaluability Analysis

For evaluability analysis of the project, relevant documents such as Project Documents, Annual Progress Reports, Baseline Report, Result Framework and Target, Outputs, and Indicators have been reviewed. Moreover, a briefing meeting was conducted with the project's delegates for more clarifications about the final evaluation. From the observation of the document reviewed and understanding from the meeting, it can be concluded that the project can be evaluated to the full extent in a reliable and credible fashion.

2.2 Final Evaluation Information

Evaluation type (project/ outcome/thematic/country programme, etc.)	Project
Final/midterm review/ other	Final Evaluation
Period under evaluation	21 days under 2 months period
Evaluators	Individual Consultant
Evaluator's name and email address	Mohammed Jashimuddin, PhD mjashimuddin2001@yahoo.co.uk

2.3 Purpose

The purpose of the final evaluation is to assess the process and progress of the CHTWCA project under the SID-CHT project so far compared to its targets defined in the result framework. The final evaluation will also evaluate and document the project activities' relevance, efficiencies, effectiveness, impact, coherence, and sustainability to understand and undertake necessary adjustments to the project for the remaining period so that the project can achieve its planned goal and objectives as committed. The evaluation will also generate knowledge for wider use, assess the scope for scaling up the current project, and serve as a quality assurance tool for both upward and downward accountability.

2.4 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the evaluation are:

1. To assess the performance of CHTWCA, since its inception to date, against the outcome and output indicators as set out in the Result-framework.
2. To assess how far CHTWCA has come in achieving the objective measured through the impact indicators identified in the Result-framework.
3. To draw the positive and negative, and foreseen and unforeseen, changes and effects driven by project-supported interventions.
4. To examine the assumptions embedded in the Theory of Change of CHTWCA and assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, and sustainability of the project drawn from its design and implementation.
5. To draw lessons learned and good practices for the BFD/GOB and UNDP replication and/or up-scaling and provide forward-looking recommendations for the next programming phase.

The evaluation will employ OECD evaluation criteria (Relevance, Coherence, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact, and Sustainability). The final evaluation aims at critically reviewing and identifying what has worked well in the project, what challenges have been faced, and what lessons were learned throughout

the implementation period. The evaluation will also generate knowledge for wider uses, assess the scope for scaling up the ongoing phase, and serve as a quality assurance tool for both upward and downward accountability. The evaluation will provide credible, useful, evidence-based information that enables the timely incorporation of its findings, recommendations, and lessons into the decision-making processes of UNDP, and the Government.

2.5 Scope of Evaluation

This final evaluation will cover implementation of the project from January 2020 to August 2023. The final project evaluation will be conducted from August to September 2023 (Annex 3).

2.5.1 Scope of Work of the Assignment

The assignment will be completed in 4 stages. The details scope of work for this assignment is given below.

Planning Stage

- Planning meeting with CHTWCA;
- Collect and review relevant project documents, policies, circulars, ordinances, rules, annual reports, study reports etc.;
- Preparation of study design and Questionnaire;
- Design and develop a work plan for evaluation study;
- Submission of Inception report;
- Finalization of the inception report
- Orientation of field-level data collection team;
- Finalization of different Questionnaire and checklists through the pre-test

Data Collection Stage

- Collection of data for evaluation study through Questionnaires and checklists
- Supervision of data collection activities

Analysis Stage

- Database development
- Qualitative & Quantitative Data entry
- Undertake data management for processing and analysis of data;
- Data analysis through generating output tables and graphs;
- Problem identification and recommendations formulation

Reporting Stage

- Draft Report preparation and submission;
- Draft Final report preparation, submission, and presentation;
- Submission of the final report.

CHAPTER 3 : EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Approach

The following OCED DAC criteria and evaluation framework were adopted for the evaluation process.



Figure 3.1: Approach of the Assignment

3.2 Overall Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative assessments were conducted, depending on the nature of the project activities and corresponding performance indicators. Quantitative assessment was conducted based on the secondary reports from CHTWCA such as, Annual Progress Reports (APR), MEL Plan etc., while the qualitative survey included In-depth Interviews (IDIs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

3.3 Evaluation Criteria and Key Guiding Questions

3.3.1 Evaluation Questions

The evaluation will follow the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria - Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, and Impact. Human Rights and Gender Equality were added as cross-cutting criteria. The following evaluation questions were considered to address different evaluation criteria:

Relevance

- To what extent is the design of CHTWCA as well as the implementation approach/ methodology relevant to the current CHT contexts, including both national context and local conditions of the project intervention areas?
- How relevant is CHTWCA to UN and UNDP strategies in Bangladesh (i.e., CPD, UNSDCF), UNDP Strategic Plan, Vision 2041, Eighth Five Year Plan and SDGs?
- To what extent has the project design and implementation taken cross-cutting issues into account, such as gender equality, human rights-based approach (HRBA), and Leaving no one behind (LNOB)?

- To what extent has the “Theory of Change” of the project been helpful in achieving the results? Is there any gap between the project reality and a pathway to achieve the results, hypothesis, assumptions, and risks identified when developing the Theory of Change?
- To what extent were the lessons learned from the current Phase considered in designing the next Phase

Effectiveness

- To what extent has the project been on track so far toward achieving its planned outcomes and outputs as per the approved RF? This includes a critical analysis of the project’s achievements of indicators and targets.
- What factors have contributed to achieving or not achieving the intended outcomes and outputs? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?
- What are the challenges that the projects have faced during their implementation? What measures have already been taken to mitigate those challenges?
- What, if any, alternative strategies would have been more effective in achieving the project objectives?
- What would be the bottlenecks and changes if the project is not achieving the results as planned? (it should consider both external and internal factors)

Efficiency

- How efficiently has the project spent the available budget so far as per Pro. Doc. and annual work plan?
- Is budget allocation well-considered to achieve the results to date in terms of cost efficiency?
- To what extent is financial management efficient and effective?
- Are the project’s institutional and implementation arrangements appropriate, effective and efficient for the successful achievement of the project’s objectives? How effectively has the project been managed?
- To what extent has the M&E system supported effective project management and implementation?

Coherence

- How well does CHTWCA fits with the prevailing political, social, economic and environmental challenges of the project area?
- How well CHTWCA aligns with national development objectives and interventions at a national level
- How well CHTWCA aligns with external policy commitments such as the SDGs.

Impact

- To what extent CHTWCA created change that really matters to people?
- What changes have been achieved and for whom?
- Has the intervention caused a significant change in the lives of the intended beneficiaries?
- Did all the intended target groups, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, benefit equally from the intervention?
- Did the intervention cause higher-level effects (such as changes in norms or systems)?
- How will CHTWCA contribute to changing society for the better?

Sustainability

- To what extent did the project interventions contribute towards sustaining the results achieved by the project? What could be potential new areas of work and innovative measures for sustaining the results?
- What could be done to strengthen exit strategies and sustainability of the project?
- To what extent have lessons learned been documented by the project on a continual basis to inform the project for needful change?
- What is the probability of the benefits of the interventions under CHTWCA continuing in the long term?
- Has the project considered necessary institutional arrangement of the government stakeholders/partner organizations to be set up to make the project's impact sustainable over a longer term?

Gender equality

- To what extent are the activities of CHTWCA adopting a gender-responsive approach and making gender equality an integral part of the project?

Human rights

- To what extent has the project design and implementation taken cross-cutting issues into account, such as gender equality, human rights-based approach (HRBA)?
- To what extent have poor, indigenous, and physically challenged girls and women and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from the work of CHTWCA?

3.3.2 Gender and Human Rights-based Approach

As part of the requirement, the final review included an assessment of the extent to which the design, implementation, and results of the project have incorporated a gender equality perspective and a rights-based approach. In addition, the methodology that was used in the final evaluation, including data collection and analysis methods, was human rights and gender-sensitive to the greatest extent possible, with data and findings disaggregated by Gender as far as possible. Detailed analysis of disaggregated data were undertaken as part of the final evaluation from which findings are consolidated to make recommendations and identify lessons learned for the enhanced gender-responsive and rights-based approach of the project.

3.4 Evaluation Methodology and Approach

3.4.1 Proposed Methodology

A mixed-method approach, including Documents review, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was adopted. Since qualitative data will supplement quantitative findings, certain level of qualitative data collection was required for some outcome indicators. Where possible, quantitative data from different studies under the project such as, forest regeneration study, GIS mapping, REDD+ sub-national plan, VCF management plan, PAs management plan, economic analysis etc. were used as far as possible. Limited quantitative data were also collected from the field to supplement study reports.

Following data collection methods were employed:

The final evaluation of the project required a combination of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods and instruments. A participatory and consultative approach was followed that ensured close engagement with the evaluation consultant, implementing partners and other stakeholders. The following methodological tools and approaches were considered:

3.4.1.1 Document review

This would include a review of all relevant documentation, inter alia (please refer to Annex 4 for final list)

- Signed Project document of CHTWCA under SID-CHT.
- Approved Technical Assistance Project Proforma (TAPP) of CHTWCA under SID-CHT Project.
- Theory of change and results framework.
- Project quality assurance reports.
- Annual workplans.
- Quarterly progress reports.
- The nine Annual Progress Reports.
- Results-oriented monitoring reports.
- Minutes of the PIC and NSC meetings.
- Technical/financial monitoring reports.

3.4.1.2 Interviews and meetings with key stakeholders

MOCHTA officials, officials from relevant line ministries, traditional institutions, PNGOs, as well as community leaders and civil society members (please refer to Annex 5 for final list), as follows:

- Semi-structured interviews, based on questions designed for different stakeholders based on evaluation questions around relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.
- Key informant Interviews (KII) and focus group discussions with the MOCHTA and its ground officials, and the key stakeholders relevant to the project.

Field level data were collected through field visits to selected sample locations of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban districts where the project interventions have been implemented by the partner organizations such as, UNDP, MOCHTA, HDCs, BFD, PNGOs.

3.4.2 Data collection strategies

Data were collected from relevant stakeholders (please refer to Annex 5 for the final list) employing different data collection tools such as, in-depth interviews (Annex 6: Tools 1), key informant interviews (KII) (Annex 6: Tool 2) and focus group discussions (FGD) (Annex 6: Tool 3), and identifying and recording success stories through case studies (Annex 6: Tool 4).

3.4.2.1 Key Informant Interviews (KII) at the Field Level

KII was conducted on selected key persons involved in the implementation of the project from the three HDCs. A total of 17 KII was conducted from the study area as follows (please also refer to the list of persons interviewed from Annex 5A).

SL	KII Respondents	Total	Remarks
01	HDC Chairman/Staff	02	Rangamati & Khagrachari HDCs
02	Circle Chiefs	01	Chakma Circle
03	DFOs/ROs	04	Rangamati & Bandarban
04	Headmen	02	Rangamati
05	Karbaries	01	Khagrachari
06	Community leader (CMC Member)	02	Rangamati, Khagrachari & Bandarban
07	Civil society member	01	Bandarban

08	PNGOs Manager/field official	04	Rangamati, Khagrachari & Bandarban
Grand Total		17	

3.4.2.2 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) at the Field Level

Focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted in selected communities to cover all three hill districts. Each FGD was attended by at least 10 or more members having 40-50% female members. A total of 6 FGD were conducted from the study area as follows (please also refer to the list of persons interviewed from Annex 5B).

SL	FGD Respondents	Total	Remarks
01	VCF management committee and participants	03	
02	VConF committee and participants	02	
03	Local Volunteer Mediators Forums (LVMFs) members	01	
Grand Total		06	

3.4.2.3 In-depth interviews at the field level

In-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted from randomly selected beneficiaries of the project from different categories as follows. A total of 25 beneficiaries were interviewed using a semi structured questionnaire format (Annex 6: Tools 1). Although 50% female beneficiaries were targeted to interview but due to time limitation only 8 out of 25 (32%) female respondents were interviewed (please also refer to the list of persons interviewed from Annex 5C).

SL	In-depth interview respondents	Total	Remarks
01	VCF community member (40-60% women)	05	
02	Headwater RFs community member (40-60% women)	05	
03	PAAs community member (40-60% women)	05	
04	GBV support services beneficiaries (100% women)	05	
Grand Total		20	

- Note: In-depth interviews were planned to collect information from different stakeholders based on evaluation questions around relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. Demographic and economic data will be supplemented from economic study conducted by the project in the activity area

3.4.3 Data analysis and presentation:

The evaluation shall include robust analysis using statistical software (if required). Qualitative data collected through KIIs and FGDs will also be analyzed extensively to provide a picture of the project's results and impacts. Data and evidence will be triangulated to address evaluation questions as well as achievements of all output indicators will be linked with OECD framework.

3.5 Evaluation Ethics

This evaluation was conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG's Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (Annex 7). The consultant safeguarded the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees, and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing data collection and reporting. The consultant also ensured the security of the collected information.

3.6. Evaluation Matrix

The detail matrix for final evaluation of CHTWCA has been appended in Annex 2.

CHAPTER 4 : FINDINGS

4.1 Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Coherence, Impact, Sustainability, Gender Equality, Human Rights, Leave No One Behind

This is the core chapter of the final evaluation. The criteria are a combination of evaluation criteria used by OECD and UNDP. The following evaluation has been done on the basis of data collected from the field with subsequent analysis, interpretation, lessons learned, conclusion and recommendations along with a brief reflection on theory of change.

4.1.1 Relevance

UNDP follows strategies based on human rights, with the inclusivity principle that no one should be left behind. It acknowledges the multidimensionality of inequalities and exclusion, which largely victimizes weak and disadvantaged groups of the community including women, poor, youth etc. Therefore, it adopts multipronged, structurally transformational strategies from a gender perspective. In this connection, it strives to remove institutional, political, and legal barriers communities face. To this end, the CHTWCA was the project in which main goal was to strengthen gender-responsive local resilience through an integrated ecosystem management approach of the CHT, while the purpose was to sustain the capacity to protect and manage the natural ecosystems of the CHT. In keeping with its global and national development strategies for Bangladesh, the project was couched within a larger UNDP-initiated integrated development intervention titled Strengthening Inclusive Development (SID). The project is very much relevant with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) approach to development especially with the Strategic Priority (SP) 1 (inclusive and sustainable economic development), SP 2 (equitable human development and wellbeing), SP 3 (sustainable, healthy and resilient environment) and SP 5 (gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence) as well as with the Eighth Five Year Plan with regards to fostering inclusivity that supports a broad-based strategy of inclusiveness with a view to empowering every citizen to participate fully and benefit from the development process and helping the poor and vulnerable with social protection-based income transfers which align with empowering women, poor and disadvantaged groups by linking livelihood training, awareness creation and capacity development for sustained ecosystem governance. In the same manner, the objectives and the contents of the project are also consistent with the broader overarching policies and strategies like the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 (no poverty), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 15 (life on earth). All these policies identify strengthened ecosystem governance, resilient livelihoods, improved market access, women's empowerment, capacity development, conflict resolution, improved social cohesion and skills development as cross-cutting themes.

The final evaluation results show that most of the key informants, those who were directly involved in the implementation of the project are in high to very high agreement that the design and implementation approach of CHTWCA are relevant to the current CHT contexts, including both national context and local conditions of the project intervention areas (84%), the relevance of the project to UN/UNDP strategies in Bangladesh (86%), the proposed methodology were relevant for obtaining desired results (76%), human resource development (85%) and gender equality (85%). However, they showed moderate agreement towards human rights-based approach (HRBA) (69%) and Leaving no one behind (LNOB) (66%) (Table 4.1). Poor fund, communication gap, poor implementation of CHT Peace Accord 1997, no root level consultation, lack of CMC policy for CHT, less priority of CMC, poor livelihood support, misunderstanding about VCF, lack of coordination, time constraints and not targeting the youths are some of the important gaps identified by the key informants.

Table 4.1: Relevance of CHTWCA

Evaluation criteria	Responses	Comments
To what extent is the design of CHTWCA as well as implementation approach/methodology relevant to the current CHT contexts, including both national context and local conditions of the project intervention areas?	83.53%	High to very high agreement
How relevant is the project to UN/UNDP strategies in Bangladesh (i.e. CPD ¹ , UNDAF ²), UNSDCF Strategic Priorities, and SDGs?	85.88%	High to very high agreement
Is the proposed methodology indeed relevant for obtaining the desired result?	76.47%	High agreement
Is the project relevant for human resource development?	84.71%	High to very high agreement
To what extent has the project design and implementation considered cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality, human rights-based approach (HRBA), and Leaving no one behind (LNOB)?	Gender – 84.71% HRBA – 69.41% LNOB – 65.88%	High to very high agreement Moderate agreement Moderate agreement
To what extent has the “Theory of Change” of the project been helpful in achieving the results?	75.29%	High agreement
Is there any gap between the project reality and a pathway to achieve the results, hypothesis, assumptions, and risks identified when developing the Theory of Change?	Yes – 100% No – 0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor fund • Communication gap • Poor implementation of CHT Peace Accord 1997 • No root level consultation • No CMC policy for CHT • CMC not given priority • Poor livelihood support • Misunderstanding about VCF • Lack of coordination • Time constraints • Youth were not targeted
To what extent were the lessons learned from the current Phase considered in designing the next Phase	75.29%	High agreement

4.1.2 Effectiveness

The effectiveness of a project has to do with the extent to which a project has been able to achieve its objectives and, consequently, its outcomes and impact. The Result Framework of the project provides the basis for measuring the effectiveness of the project. The project's main objective was to strengthen gender-responsive local resilience through an integrated ecosystem management approach of the CHT, while the purpose was to sustain the capacity to protect and manage the natural ecosystems of the CHT. Since the project targeted communities living in and around headwater reserve forests and micro watersheds of CHT, the project tried to support community people with capacity development for strengthened ecosystem governance, aware them about climate change, biodiversity, forest and micro watershed conservation, resilient livelihood options and improved market access, and resolving social conflicts for improved social cohesion. The underlying premise is that economic self-reliance will empower both men and women and make them confident to cope with difficult situations while

¹ CPD – Country Programme Document; ² UNDAF – United Nations Development Assistance Framework

reducing their dependency on forests and biodiversity. In the absence of alternative income-generating and market-oriented skills, they would not have been able to make life choices on their own. Therefore, by design, the project appears well structured to achieve its objectives. The project has given due importance to the equity and inclusivity aspects in addition to gender sensitivity focused on women. The project covered all the major ethnic groups to the extent it was possible. In terms of districts, the project also ensured that all three districts received coverage. Finally, to ensure effective implementation of the project, the project has managed to evolve into multiparty collaboration. In the following, the effectiveness of the project has been provided under various categories of outcomes with analysis.

The result of the final evaluation shows that most of the key persons involved in implementing the project was in moderate to high agreement for the project being on track so far in achieving its planned outcomes and outputs as per the approved result framework (72%) and as such effectively managed so far (71%) (Table 4.2). A similar impression can also be found from the updated result framework as confirmed by the project authority. The updated result framework depicts that out of 18 indicators, 15 show more than 100% achievements and remaining 3 show less than 100% achievements with an overall average of 130% achievements (Annex 1). This clearly explains that the approach, methodology and implementation strategy of the project were effective in achieving the planned outcome and outputs. Capacitated staff and institutions, time management, effective community engagement, good project approach, field facilitation, monitoring, reform old CMC, wide acceptance by local people were some of the factors that contributed to achieving the planned outcome and outputs. On the other hand, no or fewer trusts on BFD, PA rule not supportive in CHT, no consultation with root-level people, budget limitation, lack of interdepartmental coordination, noninvolvement of circle chiefs, non-inclusion of people from remotest areas, livelihood security issue; inefficient fund management and sometimes ignorance of poor or marginalized people to be engaged in the project are mentioned as important factors that hindered the achievement of the results as desired (Table 4.2). In some instances, CMC formation was not possible due to the noninvolvement of traditional leaders, unwillingness of the people to provide NID, lack of follow-up on training outcomes, lack of timely fund distribution, poor livelihood support, poor funds, information gaps among groups, scattered target groups, remoteness, lack of logistic support (transport, fuel, etc.), no incentive (TA/DA) for patrolling and/or monitoring, absence of Circle Chief from HDC advisory body and lack of AIGAs were found as constraining factors in the effective implementation of the project. Policy reform, more government support, resolving internal problems, respecting CHT regulations by government entities, including circle in the HDC advisory body, more dialogue among different groups including root levels, formation of CMC, proper governance, organizing training at the community level, zoning jhum, resolve land conflicts etc. are some of the suggestions to overcome the constraining factors.

Interdepartmental dialogue, Internal issues, inefficient budget approval process, interference from multiple security forces, lack of coordination among stakeholders, conflict in RFs and PAs demarcation – no clear policy about the people living there, land leasing issues, absence of jhum area demarcation, absence of Forest Settlement Officer (FSO), contradictory PA rules, lack of proper land use zoning in CHT, lack of continuous fund flow, corruption of government entities, distrust of people on forest department, many agencies work in CHT seeking extra attention, community people don't engage themselves without any wage, denial from community people to involve in project activity due to lack of proper land demarcation, internal political issues or concerns, timely fund distribution problem by UNDP policy, jhum in RFs, people destroy RFs by encroachment, banana cultivation, jhum or other illegal activities, limited logistic support, no TA/DA or vehicle for emergency use, sometimes people do jhum in RF and use their traditional land for banana or other orchards are some of the challenges

faced during implementation of the project. Legal protection of VCF so that no one can lease it or sell it, acknowledgement of VCF by HDCs, no further RFs or PAs declaration, formulate village forest policy, partnership with BFD, considering REDD+ strategy, formation and strengthening of CMC, activation of land commission, transparent financial management, land demarcation, check dam establishment, free seed distribution, development of community-based ecotourism could be some alternative strategies for the better implementation of the project.

Table 4.2: Effectiveness of CHTWCA

Evaluation criteria	Responses	Comments
To what extent has the project been on track so far toward achieving its planned outcomes and outputs as per the approved result framework?	71.76%	Moderate to high agreement
What factors have contributed to the achievement or non-achievement of the outcomes and outputs?	<p>Achievement: Capacitated staff and institutions; time management; community engagement; good project approach; field facilitation, monitoring, reform old CMC; acceptance by local people</p> <p>Non-achievement: No/less trusts on BFD; PA rule not supportive in CHT; no consultation with root level people; budget limitation; lack of interdepartmental coordination; circle chiefs were not involved; people from remote areas were not included; livelihood security issue; inefficient fund management; poor or marginalized people were ignored;</p>	
How effectively the project been managed so far?	70.59%	Moderate to high agreement
What have been the constraining factors and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CMC formation was not possible due to noninvolvement of traditional leader • PA rule not supportive • Unwillingness to provide NID • No follow-up on training outcome • No timely fund distribution • Poor livelihood support • Poor fund • Information gaps among groups • Scattered target groups, remoteness • Less logistic support (transport, fuel, etc.) • No incentive for patrolling, monitoring (TA/DA); • Hidden cost/donation • No vulnerable species inventory • Absence of Circle Chief from HDC advisory body • Lack of AIGAs 	
How can or could they be overcome?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy reform • Need more government support • Need to resolve internal problems • Government entities should respect CHT regulations • Circle should be included in the HDC advisory body • More dialogue among different groups, including root level • Formation of CMC • Proper governance • Trainings should be organized at the community level • Less intervention in RFs 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jhuming should be zoned • Resolve land conflicts 		
<p>What are the challenges that the projects have faced during their implementation? What measures have already been taken to mitigate those challenges?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdepartmental dialogue • Internal issues • Inefficient budget approval process • Scattered stakeholders • Interference from multiple security forces • Lack of coordination among stakeholders • Conflict in RF and PA demarcation – no clear policy about the people living there • Land leasing issues • Absence of jhum area demarcation • Absence of Forest Settlement Officer (FSO) • PA rules are contradictory • Lack of proper land use zoning in CHT • Lack of continuous fund flow • Corruption of government entities • Distrust of people on forest department • Many agencies work in CHT seeking extra attention • Community people don't engage themselves without any wage • Denial from community people to involve in project activity due to lack of proper land demarcation • Internal political issues or concerns • Timely fund distribution problem by UNDP policy • Jhum in RFs • People destroy RFs by encroachment, banana cultivation, jhum or other illegal activities • Lack of manpower • Limited logistic support • No TA/DA, or vehicle for emergency use • Sometimes people do jhum in RF and use their traditional land for banana or other orchards 		
<p>What, if any, alternative strategies would have been more effective in achieving the project objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VCF should be legally protected so that no one can lease it or sell it • No extra policy needed, CHT Regulation 1900 is enough, all we need is acceptance of VCF by HDC • No further RF declaration • Formulate village forest policy • Need partnership with BFD • REDD+ policy should be considered • Formation and strengthening CMC • Activation of land commission • Transparent financial management • Land demarcation • Check dam establishment • Free seed distribution • Nursery establishment • Development of community-based ecotourism • Consultation at the root level 		
<p>To what extent are the activities of CHTWCA adopting a gender-</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20%; text-align: center;">88.24%</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Very high agreement</td> </tr> </table>	88.24%	Very high agreement
88.24%	Very high agreement		

responsive approach and making gender equality an integral part of the project?		
What would be the bottlenecks and changes if the project is not achieving the results as planned?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure on forest will increase • There will be no natural forest • No integration and no liaison with BFD • VCF is not accepted by BFD or other government agencies • No policy for VCF • No policy for PAs in CHT • No policy for people living in the RFs • BFD declared a number of RFs, but not enough manpower or not even have access into the RFs • Fear of leasing out RFS, PAs etc. for land or infrastructure development such as tourism • Internal political problem will aggravate • Intersectoral conflict will rise • No willingness to resolve land dispute • Nonfunctioning land commission 	

The implementation of the project was also effective as opined by the respondent beneficiaries of the project. The beneficiaries opined that they are now well aware of the project objectives in building their capacity through different trainings (75%), enabling them to be economically stable (71%), making them aware about biodiversity and climate change (71%), and how to restore VCF in helping them to conserve water for dry season (71%) (Table 4.3). All of the respondent beneficiaries (100%) mentioned that they think project interventions are relevant, efficient and effective for the needs of the people, community, biodiversity, forests, watersheds and as well as for their personal needs (Figure 4.1). Most of them (72%) received livelihood support and cattle farming (goat, pig etc.) followed by wildlife and forest conservation training (48%), cash support (32%), bamboo production training (32%), and so on (Table 4.4). When asked whether they are satisfied with the support they received from the project, majority opined that they are satisfied with the support they received (71%) (Table 4.5).

Table 4.3: Distribution of respondents by their knowledge about CHTWCA objectives

Knowledge about Objectives of CHTWCA	Male (%; n=17)	Female (%; n=7)	Total (%; n=24)
Enable local people economically stable	76	57	71
Awareness creation and Knowledge sharing about biodiversity and climate change	71	71	71
Restore VCF and water conservation during dry season	59	100	71
Capacity building by livestock husbandry training	82	57	75
Introduction of new farming strategy and crop pattern change	47	43	46
Environmental development	12	0	8

Do you think project interventions are relevant, efficient and effective for the needs of people, community, watershed, forest and biodiversity and also for your personal needs?

24 responses

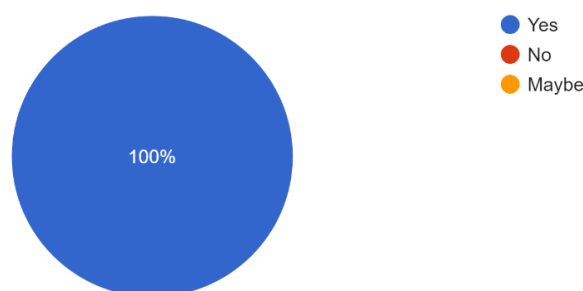


Figure 4.1: Distribution of respondents' perceptions on relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of CHTWCA

Table 4.4: Distribution of respondents by type of training or support received from CHTWCA

Support or training received from CHTWCA	Male (%; n=17)	Female (%; n=8)	Total (%; n=25)
Forest, biodiversity, wildlife and/or climate change	76	88	80
Cattle farming, chicken and/or pigeon farming	88	88	88
Livelihood support	71	75	72
Bamboo production	35	25	32
Capital support	29	38	32
New farming process	12	25	16
Health and sanitation	18	0	12
Business idea and marketing	29	13	24
GBV training	12	0	8

Table 4.5: Distribution of respondents' opinion on improved market access and satisfaction on CHTWCA support

Do you have improved market access?			
Responses	Male (%; n=17)	Female (n=7)	Total (%; n=24)
Yes	59	71	63
No	41	29	37
Total	100	100	100
Are you satisfied with the livelihood support?			
Responses	Male	Female	Total
Yes	71	71	71
No	29	29	29
Total	100	100	100

The respondent beneficiaries were also asked whether they have access to improved market in the locality majority opined that they have improved market access (63%) due to the activities of the project showing higher positive responses for female (71%) compared to male (59%) beneficiaries although a sizeable amount of respondents (37%) opined that they don't have improved market access where male responses were higher (41%) compared to female (29%) (Table 4.5). This means that access to improved market has not been possible to establish in all the project locations, and if the market access was established that helped female participants more than the male. This shows the gender-responsive approach of the CHTWCA. While asked on the effectiveness of support or training from the project to improve their livelihood, all of the respondent beneficiaries (100%) mentioned that the support or training definitely helped them to improve their livelihoods (Figure 4.2).

Did the support or training help you to improve your livelihoods?

25 responses

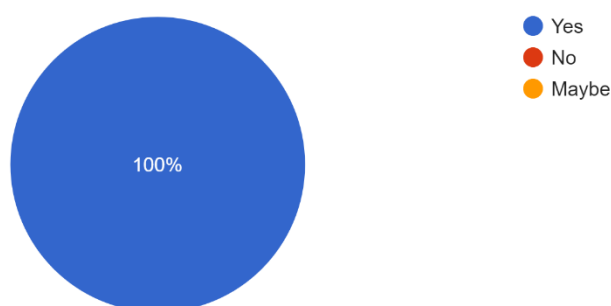


Figure 4.2: Distribution of respondents' opinions on effectiveness of support or training to improve their livelihood from CHTWCA

Did you put in practice the training and support from CHTWCA?

25 responses

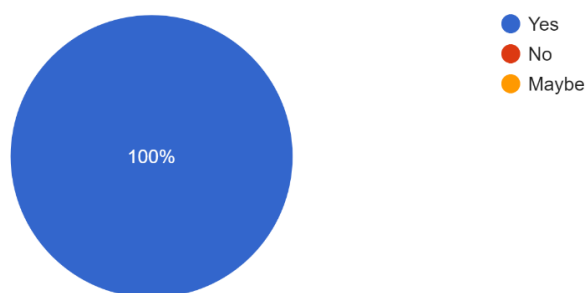


Figure 4.3: Distribution of respondents' opinions to put in practice the trainings received from CHTWCA

The project was able to bring some changes in the project locations as all the respondent beneficiaries (100%) opined that they have put into practice what they have learned from the project (Figure 4.3). They also opined that it is very important (100%) to have support system in place resource management, livelihoods and market access (Figure 4.4) and they have opined (100%) that the project outcome and outputs will be sustainable the way it is being implemented (Figure 4.5).

In your opinion, how important is it to have support systems in place for resource management, livelihoods and market access?

25 responses

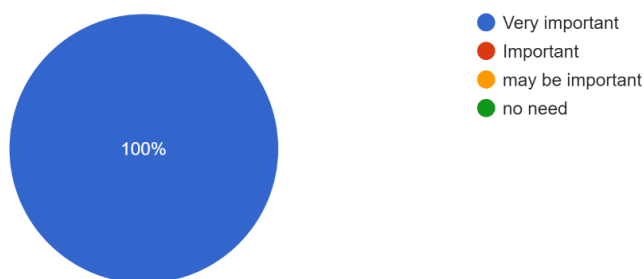


Figure 4.4: Distribution of respondents' (both male and female) opinions on the importance of support system from CHTWCA

Do you consider project output and outcome will be sustainable?

24 responses

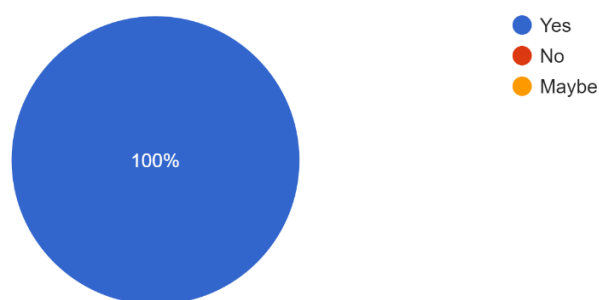


Figure 4.5: Distribution of respondents' (both male and female) opinions on the sustainability of CHTWCA output and outcome

The respondent beneficiaries were asked what will be your planned livelihood options to continue in the future and majority of male respondents have chosen turmeric, pineapple and/or vegetable cultivation (54%) and cattle farming (46%) while majority female respondents have chosen poultry farming (50%) (Table 4.6). The project has shown tremendous results in terms of achieving its objectives but still there are some challenges or problems faced by the beneficiaries or the implementing authority the project. The respondent beneficiaries opined that poor livelihood support (male – 88%; female – 86%) is the important challenge faced by the beneficiaries as they can't do much with the cash support provided from the project. Training is short and not intense or residential (male – 38%; female – 29%), no TA/DA or refreshment allowance for attending meetings (male – 38%; female – 29%), transportation problem (male – 31%; female – 43%) etc. are some of the other important challenges faced by the beneficiaries (Table 4.7).

Table 4.6: Distribution of respondents' planned livelihood options to continue

Respondents' planned livelihood options	Male (%; n=13)	Female (%; n=8)	Total (%; n=21)
Cattle farming – Cow and/or Goat	46	25	38
Poultry farming – Hen and/or Duck	0	50	19
Pigeon farming	0	13	5
Turmeric, pineapple and/or vegetable cultivation	54	13	38
Small business	15	13	14
Sewing machine	8	0	5
Fish cultivation	15	0	10

Table 4.7: Distribution of respondents' opinions on the challenges they have faced during the implementation of CHTWCA

Challenges faced	Male (%; n=16)	Female (%; n=7)	Total (%; n=23)
Poor livelihood support	88	86	87
Training is short and not intense or residential	38	29	35
No market	13	43	22
No meeting place	6	14	9
Didn't cover all families	6	29	13
No TA/DA or refreshment allowance for attending meetings	38	29	35
Transportation problem	31	43	35
No rationing system	0	14	4
Illegal encroachment and land mafia	25	14	22
No property rights	0	29	9
Extreme poverty	6	0	4
Language barriers	13	0	9
Internal political issue	6	0	4
Challenging to prevent people from going into the forest	13	0	9
No veterinary doctor	13	0	9

4.1.3 Efficiency

Project Management

Project management was somewhat challenging due to the multiethnic complex environment. Having stated that it appears UNDP's institutional capacity to manage projects and its ability to design M&E system enabled the project to compensate for some of the shortfalls created by the complex governance processes in a multi-ethnic setting. The remoteness and poor accessibility also contributed to the sterile environment of the project implementation.

From the outset, engaging the key stakeholders, particularly at the grassroots level was a problem. Despite the challenges, the project managed to develop its various forms of information and decision support systems engaging all stakeholders through the signing of the field implementation of Letters of Agreements (LOAs) and Responsible Party Agreements (RPAs) with the three Hill District Councils (HDCs), the Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD) and three local NGOs. A monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) plan was prepared and approved in consultation with USAID and based on the approved technical programme application (MEL Plan, 2020). In addition, the project also undertook an outcome survey, which has provided the implementers with a good understanding of the progress made regarding the project implementation.

The activity has a Management Information System (MIS) in place, and data are being collected per this plan's indicators. Necessary tools are designed, and data/information are generated by the assigned activity staff by each implementing agency and partner NGOs. The MEL staff are oriented/trained accordingly. MIS is managed by Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Team Leader/Project Coordinator at agency/NGO levels, District Manager at district level, and MEL Officer at regional/cluster level. Technical backstopping support is provided to make the system efficient at each level (MEL Plan, 2020).

The analyses of the project's financial details have shown that the approved budget was spent well by following the approved budget guidelines of USAID and UNDP. Except for some savings of USD 172,819 up to 29 August 2023, the total approved budget of USD 14 million is expected to be spent in full by 31 December 2023 (Annex 2) showing an efficient utilization of approved budget. Although the overall expenditure under each of the line items follows the approved budget and relevant procedures, some positive divergences in terms of efficiency are noticed while analysing the Result-wise budget and spending. A summary of part budget allocation and expenditure as collected from the project office shows (Table 4.3) that by spending 88% (CPI = 0.88) of the project budget based on the total allocated budget for all the three Results of the project during the period from 16 January 2020 to 31 December 2023, most of the planned targets have been achieved 100% or more with an average of 130% (Annex 1). Result 2 was achieved in full by spending 95% (CPI = 0.95) of the allocated budget, followed by Result 1 (93%) and Result 3 (61%) (Table 4.8). This means that with less spending, all the physical targets have been achieved in full or exceeded. It is, therefore, concluded that the project's programme field activities were implemented efficiently. However, time constraints, complex system of fund disbursement, inefficient fund management, remoteness, scattered target groups, lack of logistic support, ignorance of poor or marginalized people to be engaged in the project and lack of communication facilities etc. (Table 4.2) are some of the important factors found responsible for field delays by key informant interviews.

Considering all the interventions, supporting arrangements and status of achievements of indicators as per the result framework, the project has been implemented efficiently. The key informants' interview also resulted in high agreement (80%) that the project efficiently spent the available budget as per the project document and annual work plan and efficiently managed the project (Table 4.9). This was possible with the approved MEL plan (very high agreement, 92%) and the project's appropriate effective and efficient institutional and implementation arrangements for successfully achieving the project's objectives (high agreement, 75%). However, the project's budget allocation was not well-considered to achieve the results to date in terms of cost efficiency (low agreement, 41%) and also the financial management was not efficient and effective (low to moderate agreement, 52%) as opined by the key informant interviews (Table 4.9).

Table 4.8: Summary of budget allocation and expenditure from 16 Jan 2020 - 31 Dec 2023

Sl. No.	Results	Budget (16 Jan'20 – 31 Dec'23) (USD) (1)	Total Expenditure (16 Jan'20 – 31 Dec'23) (USD) (2)	Cost Performance Index (CPI) (3 = 2/1)
1	Result – 1: Strengthened Ecosystem Governance	2,662,164.00	2,486,017.00	0.93
2	Result – 2: Resilient Livelihoods with Market Access Improved	733,980.00	695,538.00	0.95
3	Result – 3: Reduced Conflicts and Improved Social Cohesion among Communities for Ecosystem Conservation	764,686.00	468,449.00	0.61
Subtotal of Programme Cost		4,160,830.00	3,650,004.00	0.88

Table 4.9: Efficiency of CHTWCA

Evaluation criteria	Responses	Comment
How efficiently has the project spent the available budget so far as per Pro doc and annual work plan?	80.00%	High agreement
Is budget allocation well-considered to achieve the results to date in terms of cost efficiency?	41.18%	Low agreement
To what extent is financial management efficient and effective?	51.76%	Low to Moderate agreement
Are the project's institutional and implementation arrangements appropriate, effective and efficient for the successful achievement of the project's objectives?	75.29%	High agreement
How efficiently has the project been managed?	80.00%	High agreement
To what extent has the M&E system supported effective project management and implementation?	91.76%	Very high agreement

4.1.4 Coherence

The Hill Tract Region is the most marginalized area among the marginalized places in Bangladesh. Historically normal pace of development was hampered by the conflict arising from identity politics. However, the Hill Tract Accord of 1997 created the space for development. The CHT region still lags to receive different basic human rights support compared to other districts in Bangladesh due to remoteness, inaccessibility, internal conflicts etc. As a result, the extended government-supported social safety net programs could not cover the CHT. So, most people still depend on their natural resources, such as forests, land etc. for their subsistence. As a matter of policy and strategy, the government committed its resources to address poverty and through other measures for enhancing the dignity and identity of the indigenous people of the Hill Tracts. As a result, the hill tract region enjoys autonomy in planning and implementing all forms of development initiatives. The contextualization of the socio-economic status of the Hill Tracts population led to the conclusion that community people, particularly the women, are way behind in terms education and skills than the people living in the mainland. The project follows UNDP's strategy under SID-CHT to strengthen the CHT population's capacity CHT population's capacity to shape and make decisions that affect their lives. The project is aligned with the GOB's Seventh Five-Year Plan and other national planning documents and supports the implementation of the CHT Peace Accord (MEL Plan, 2020). The project

is contributing in meeting the above-stated SID-CHT objectives. Improved participatory management of Village Common Forests (VCFs), Protected Areas (PAs) and headwater Reserved Forests (RFs), as being achieved under Result 1, is contributing to strengthening community-based management of VCFs and their associated watersheds, and participatory forest management in the activity PAs and headwater RFs and their associated watersheds. Improved resilient livelihoods as implemented under Result 2 in the villages/paras located in and around the RFs, PAs and VCFs contributes to income generation of local people and thereby reduces community dependency on nearby forests for exploitative and unsustainable harvesting of forest produce. Under Result 3 social cohesion, reduced conflicts and participatory management of VCFs, PAs and RFs in partnerships of the CHT institutions, leaders and communities is resulting in strengthening of democratic governance with increased peoples' participation and shared decision-making on natural resource management in the CHT.

The final evaluation result suggests that there is moderate to high agreement (68%) among the key informants interviewed regarding government policies and priorities that relate to enhancing outcome and output of the project. There is also moderate to high agreement (71%) among the respondent key informants that the project fits with the prevailing political, social, economic and environmental challenges of the project locations (Table 4.10). This means that there is a lack of government policy support to effectively implement the interventions of the project as planned. There are several government policies and strategies that fit with the project, such as the CHT Peace Accord 1997, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Act (Amended) 2003, the Hill District Council Acts 1989, the CHT Regulation 1900, the Forest Act 1927 and subsequent amendments, the Bangladesh Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act 2012, Social Forestry Rules 2004, National Forest Policy 1994, National land Use Policy 2001, Chittagong Hill Tracts Forest Transit Rules 1973 etc. However, due to the differences in the socio-political contexts of CHT compared to plain districts some of the laws, polices or regulations are not coherent and demands revisions for full functionality. However, the project aligns with national development objectives and interventions at a national level (high agreement, 80%) and with external policy commitments such as the SDGs (high to moderate agreement, 87%).

Table 4.10: Coherence of CHTWCA

Evaluation criteria	Responses	Comment
How do government policies and priorities fit in relation to enhancing outcome and output of the CHTWCA project?	68.24%	Moderate to high agreement
How well does CHTWCA fits with the prevailing political, social, economic and environmental challenges of the project area?	71.76%	Moderate to high agreement
How well CHTWCA aligns with national development objectives and interventions at a national level	80.00%	High agreement
How well CHTWCA aligns with external policy commitments such as the SDGs.	87.06%	High to very high agreement
Number of laws, policies, regulation or standards addressing sustainable landscapes (VCFs, RFs, PAs) formally proposed, adapted or implemented as supported by USG assistance	52.22%	Low to moderate agreement

On the contrary, the respondent key informants are unaware (low to moderate agreement, 52%) about number of laws, policies, regulation or standards addressing sustainable landscapes (VCF, RF, PA) formally proposed, adapted or implemented as supported by USG assistance. Although, according to result framework it is seen that 7 strategies/plans (1 IWMP for headwater RFs, 1 Action plan, 3 PA

Management Plans, I REDD+ Sub National Plan, VCF Management Plan) have been proposed and is being implemented under the project.

4.1.5 Impact

The evaluation focused on impact extensively. Broadly speaking, the CHTWCA project has contributed to building resilient livelihoods and ecosystem governance in the targeted watershed areas. The outcome level results have indicated improvement in the community livelihoods as well as in the state of forests (VCFs) in the targeted watersheds. The community people are now more aware of the impacts of climate change and the need for resilient livelihoods to cope with the hardships. They are now more confident than before to earn their livelihoods with the knowledge, skill and livelihood supports they have received from the project.

The output level results suggested that the project has brought on positive changes in the lives of the people and their communities. There were instances where the impact of the program was demonstrated beyond the immediate project participants. Additionally, reforms at the policy level require a longer time horizon to germinate. A common theme has emerged from the qualitative findings in this study that the acute water crisis in the targeted communities has largely been solved by the project intervention. The gravity flow system (GFS) established in 144 locations are now supporting 11,140 people by providing access to water for domestic uses however there still remains the shortage of safe drinking water as GFS water carries lots of soil particles and impurities for which these are not safe to drink. Access to water has benefitted the women in many ways by saving their time for collecting water and using that time in household maintenance and other productive purposes.

However, it is too early to reflect on the impact. The respondent key persons are in high agreement (81%) that the project created change that really matters to people and all of them (100%) agreed that the intervention caused a significant change in the lives of the intended beneficiaries (Table 4.6). Capacity building (training), awareness creation (climate change, biodiversity conservation), monetary support to start something, increase in confidence, women empowerment (gender balance, karate training etc.), water security (access to water), market creation etc. are some of the interventions that caused a significant change in the lives of the intended beneficiaries. The result suggests that intended target groups, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, did benefit equally from the intervention (yes, 88%) although the intervention did not cause higher-level effects (such as changes in norms or systems) (no, 88%) (Table 4.11). There are positive changes in target beneficiaries, their communities, and duty bearers due to the project (yes, 94%). Increased livelihood support, capacity building, stimulating indigenous knowledge, awareness creation, sustainable cropping pattern, marketing strategy, water security, biodiversity conservation, reducing forest dependency, knowledge sharing, group formation (youth club, debate club, sports club, etc.), women empowerment etc. are some of the suggestions by the respondent key persons to achieve a better impact from the project. When asked who and how many to benefit, the respondents were unsure about how many (55%, low to moderate agreement) but mentioned that the project will benefit local people.

Table 4.11: Impact of CHTWCA

Evaluation criteria	Responses	Comment
To what extent CHTWCA created change that really matters to people?	81.18	High agreement
Has the intervention caused a significant change in the lives of the intended beneficiaries?	Yes (100%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building (training) • Awareness creation (climate change, biodiversity conservation) • Monetary support to start something • Increase in confidence • Women empowerment (gender balance, karate training) • Water security • Market creation
Did all the intended target groups, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, benefit equally from the intervention?	Yes (88%)	High to very high agreement
Did the intervention cause higher-level effects (such as changes in norms or systems)?	No (88%)	Low to very low agreement
How will CHTWCA contribute to changing society for the better?	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livelihood support • Capacity building • Stimulating indigenous knowledge • Awareness creation • Sustainable cropping pattern • Marketing strategy • Water security • Biodiversity conservation • Reducing forest dependency • Knowledge sharing • Group formation (youth club, debate club, sports club, etc.) • Women empowerment
Is there any positive/negative change in target beneficiaries, their communities, and duty bearers as a result of the project?	Positive (94%)	High to very high agreement
Who and how many were to benefit?	55%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low to moderate agreement • Local people will benefit

4.1.6 Sustainability

CHTWCA is being implemented for the last 10 years in the CHT with the goal of strengthening gender responsive local resilience through an integrated ecosystem management approach of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and with the purpose of sustained capacity to protect and manage the natural ecosystems of the CHT. So, it is expected that the capacity developed by the project for the communities and institutions will sustain and people, community and the ecosystem will be benefited in the present and future. To this end the key persons interviewed were in high agreement that the

project interventions contribute towards sustaining the results achieved by the project (81%, high agreement), lessons learned have been documented by the project continually to inform the project for needful change (81%, high agreement), the probability of the benefits of the interventions under the project continuing in the long term (82%, high agreement), and the project considered necessary institutional arrangement of the government stakeholders or partner organizations to be set up to make the project’s impact sustainable over a longer term (84%, high agreement) (Table 4.12). A similar result also observed from the beneficiaries’ interview where 100% of respondents mentioned that the project interventions will be sustainable in the future (Figure 4.5). Demarcation of RFs, revision of land leasing policy, land tenure security, creation of AIGAs (such as fruit garden, automated loom, rayon loom, handicrafts, cattle farming, sewing, motor vehicle maintenance, computer and electronics training etc.), increase social safety net programmes (health, education and sanitation for all), women empowerment, conflict mitigation (such as, land dispute), consultation at the root level, BFD-community partnership in RFs, interdepartmental coordination, buffer area identification, creation of eco-tourism spots, regular follow-ups, CMC and CPG formation, school level activities on climate change, biodiversity, natural resources etc., intensive in-house training, engage youth, human rights issue, food security, wildlife conservation etc. are some of the potential areas to support for the sustainability of the project impacts. As such, increasing budget, creating skilled man power, facilitating inter-sectoral integration, minimizing internal problems and political intervention, providing policy support for VCF mainstreaming, increased livelihood support, reduce gap between BFD and community, staff capacity building, engage more women, poor and youth, proper fund allocation for proper task in time, revision of action plan, increased livelihood support, caring root level people, increasing project activities with large target groups etc. are some of the suggestions to strengthen exit strategies and sustainability of the project (Table 4.12).

Table 4.12: Sustainability of CHTWCA

Evaluation criteria	Responses	Comment
To what extent did the project interventions contribute towards sustaining the results achieved by the project?	81.18%	High agreement
What could be potential new areas of work and innovative measures for sustaining the results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demarcation of RFs • Revision of land leasing policy • Land tenure security • Creation of AIGAs, such as fruit garden, automated loom, rayon loom, handicrafts, cattle farming, sewing, motor vehicle maintenance, computer and electronics training etc. • Increase social safety net programmes • Health, education and sanitation for all • Conflict mitigation such as, land dispute • Consultation at the root level • BFD-community partnership in RFs • Interdepartmental coordination • Buffer area identification • Creation of eco-tourism spots • Regular follow-ups • CMC and CPG formation • School level activities on climate change, biodiversity, natural resources etc. • Intensive in-house training 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage youth • Human rights issue • Food security • Wildlife conservation • Women empowerment 	
What could be done to strengthen exit strategies and sustainability of the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget enrichment • Skilled man power • Inter sectoral integration • Minimize internal problems and political intervention • Policy support for VCF mainstreaming • Increased livelihood support • Reduce gap between BFD and community • Staff capacity building • Engage more women, poor and youth • Proper fund allocation for proper task in time • Revision of action plan • Increased livelihood support • Caring root-level people • Increasing project activities with large target groups 	
To what extent have lessons learned been documented by the project on a continual basis to inform the project for needful change?	81.18%	High agreement
What is the probability of the benefits of the interventions under CHTWCA continuing in the long term?	82.35%	High agreement
Has the project considered necessary institutional arrangement of the government stakeholders/partner organizations to be set up to make the project's impact sustainable over a longer term?	83.53%	High agreement

4.1.7 Gender Equality and Human Rights

Given the fact that the indigenous women are the most marginalized population among the population who are generally even more marginalized in comparison to the marginalized population; the project in question has in fact addressed basic human right issue in the form of gender equality. Even though the indigenous cultures have some propensity towards matrilineal society, but in reality, women's basic rights have been violated through assigning them with the disproportionate burden both inside and outside the household. Therefore, as the project has correctly diagnosed that the backwardness of women in terms of education achievement and economic empowerment cannot be mitigated through providing more resources; rather support towards gender equality needs to be transformational in that it should be able to bring sustainable structural changes in terms of gender relationship within the society and its institutions. The project interventions undertaken that support the cause of gender equalities and human rights include selecting 40-50% women as beneficiaries of the project to train them with livelihood skills, aware them with climate change, forest and biodiversity conservation, fight against any human rights violation, be part of VCF management and other community groups for self-reliance, and raise their voices to get dignified roles in the society.

Gender rights can hardly be separated from human rights. The project tends to support women and poor disadvantaged groups. Bangladesh constitution makes it mandatory for the state to provide basic human rights for all its citizen. This human rights-based focus has led the project to consider all the factors and take necessary measures to take preventive and supportive measures against all forms of violence against women. In order to further strengthen the promotion of human rights for the women multi-stakeholder's orientations have been organized. Furthermore, women have been oriented about their rights and encouraged to raise their voices. They have also been provided with information on seeking support while in distress and seeking legal measures against the offenders.

It is evident from the updated result framework that CHTWCA focused on gender-responsive in all its interventions implemented by different partners. Women were given due preference in different activities of the project with a range between 33-53% of the total beneficiaries. Higher percentage of women (53%, Indicator 17) were reached providing gender-based violence (GBV) support followed by number of people with economic benefits derived from sustainable NRM and/or biodiversity conservation (49%, Indicator 16), number of people with livelihood co-benefits (47%, Indicator 10), number of farmers receiving training on sustainable farming (44%, Indicator 11) and so on (Table 4.13).

Table 4.13: Gender responsiveness of CHTWCA interventions (values in the parentheses shows percentatge of total) (Source: Year 10 PDT Table)

CHTWCA performance indicators	Targets	Achievements		
		Male	Female	Total
Indicator 7: Number of people trained in climate change adaptation	13,504	8,023 (59%)	5,591 (41%)	13,614 (100%)
Indicator 10: Number of people receiving livelihood co-benefits (monetary or nonmonetary)	142,831	139,020 (53%)	123,922 (47%)	262,942 (100%)
Indicator 11: Number of farmers receiving training on sustainable farming	5,844	8,232 (56%)	6,412 (44%)	14,644 (100%)
Indicator 12: Number of people participating in awareness raising activities on NRM and biodiversity conservation practices	144,045	91,439 (58%)	65,692 (42%)	157,131 (100%)
Indicator 13: Number of people trained on the activity management and finance related issues supported by USG assistance	2,408	1,440 (63%)	858 (37%)	2,298 (100%)
Indicator 15: Number of people trained on peacebuilding and resolution of conflicts or the drivers of conflict in the Bandarban Hill District through USG funding dedicated to resolving the conflict or the drivers of conflict	748	729 (67%)	362 (33%)	1,091 (100%)
Indicator 16: Number of people with improved economic benefits derived from sustainable NRM and/or biodiversity conservation as a result of USG assistance	32,800	22,022 (51%)	21,158 (49%)	43,180 (100%)
Indicator 17: Number of people reached by a USG funded intervention providing GBV services	1660	989 (47%)	1,114 (53%)	2,103 (100%)
Indicator 18: Percentage of female participants designed to increase access to productive economic resources (assets, credit, income or employment)	50%	-	79%	-

4.1.7.1 Gender Specific Activities

GBV Support:

USAID, through CHTWCA, provided support to 2,103 community members, including 1,114 female (53%) participants and 989 male (47%) participants by delivering Gender-Based Violence (GBV)-related services (Table 4.13). The activities involved participation in a community awareness session covering topics such as social cohesion, conflict management, GBV, trafficking, and child marriage. Significantly, among them, 159 victims (females subjected to physical abuse by their male counterparts in the context of dowry, extramarital affairs, and polygamy) received a comprehensive package of support, including cash assistance, counseling, and legal aid, to address the adverse impact on them and their families.

Private sector linkages by the women small entrepreneurs:

As a result of improved market access with AARONG, the CHTWCA facilitated the establishment of the following:

1. Two multipurpose women groups developed in Bandarban Hill District: a) Ledu Para Bengali community and b) Mirinza Para Mro community. In total 58 women were involved and they earned BDT 70,000 by selling Nakshikatha, Napkins, Shawls, Bamboo and Handicrafts;
2. Two women weaver groups were developed at Suanlu para Bawm and Lapaiguy Para Marma communities. In total 60 women were involved and they earned BDT 85,000 by selling their weaving products to Aarong but also in the local markets; and
3. In total 56 women weavers (mainly with Bawm and Mro communities of Amphu para and Happy hill para) earned BDT 63,000 by selling their weaving products and handicrafts to Aarong and in local markets through the district women weaver association in Bandarban Hill District.

The final evaluation result also shows that the key informants interviewed are in high to very high agreement (85%) that the activities of the project are adopting a gender-responsive approach and making gender equality an integral part of the project. They also agree (80%) that the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women (Table 4.14). However, while asked about human rights issues the respondents were in moderate to high agreement (73%) that the project design and implementation has taken human rights-based approach (HRBA) into account. They were also in low to moderate agreement (53%) that poor, indigenous, and physically challenged girls, women, and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from the project (Table 4.14).

4.1.8 Leave No One Behind

The project in principle, seeks to ensure no one is left behind. Having stated that the project has limited resources, therefore the project cannot reach everyone for practical reasons. However, the project has attempted to ensure that no poor people, particularly women from the marginalized population be excluded from being selected as project beneficiaries. According to the survey result, the KII respondents are in moderate to high agreement (72%) that the projects' response and recovery initiative(s) have been inclusive in supporting the most vulnerable and marginalized group in the implementing area. At the same time, they were also in high agreement that the project helps to eradicate poverty (80%), end discrimination and exclusion (81%), and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole (80%) (Table 4.14).

Table 4.14: Gender equality, Human rights and Leave no one behind of CHTWCA

Evaluation criteria	Responses	Comment
Gender equality		
To what extent are the activities of CHTWCA adopting a gender-responsive approach and making gender equality an integral part of the project?	84.71%	High to very high agreement
To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women?	80.00%	High agreement
Were there any unintended effects?	No	
Human rights		
To what extent has the project design and implementation taken cross-cutting issues into account, such as human rights-based approach (HRBA)?	72.94%	Moderate to high agreement
To what extent have poor, indigenous, and physically challenged girls and women and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from CHTWCA?	52.94%	Low to moderate agreement
Leave no one behind (LNOB)		
To what extent have the projects' response and recovery initiative(s) been inclusive in supporting the most vulnerable and marginalized group in the implementing area	71.76%	Moderate to high agreement
To what extent the project helps to (i) eradicate poverty in all its forms; (ii) end discrimination and exclusion; and (iii) reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole	(i) 80.00% (ii) 81.18% (iii) 80.00%	High agreement

4.1.9 Risks regarding legal frameworks, policies, governance structures, and processes

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the remote hills are under increased stress as a result of intensified agriculture, fruit gardening, illegal logging, road construction, and unsustainable slash and burn practices. Increased temperatures, as well as more erratic and violent precipitation, exacerbate these trends. These trends have a significant impact on communities' livelihoods and food security. Government institutions and communities have neglected common resource management in the post-conflict period, although it has historically been an integral part of CHT community life.

Partnerships with both government and traditional institutions of CHT are unique arrangements that give rise to risks inherent in developing new administrative arrangements, undertaking policy dialogue and managing expectations. These partnerships. The traditional institutions in the CHT, as also acknowledged in the CHT Regulation 1900, may be reluctant to engage in advocacy or common resource management if not given priority. In addition, the local leaders who represent the community people (Upazila Chairman and Vice Chairman, Union Parishad Chairman and Members etc.) may also be reluctant in resource management efforts if not consulted before initiating any development interventions.

However, CHTWCA largely managed to mitigate the above-mentioned risks. Mitigation measures were implemented to manage relationships with local people and institutions, including hiring locally, aligning with both local and national structures (where they differ), and utilizing local focal points to

manage contacts with communities. Additionally, the UNDP has developed emergency procedures and risk mitigation measures to address political unrest. Additionally, the CHTWCA Project is built around local resilience plans, capacitating communities, and government and traditional institutions to assist in identifying advocacy inputs and coordinating resource management.

4.2 Findings from FGD Responses with Implications to strengthened ecosystem governance, resilient livelihoods and conflict resolution for enhanced social cohesion

The following sections consist of the summary of responses from focus group discussion (FGD) by the project's various stakeholders. This exercise has enabled the evaluation team to triangulate its findings as well as to draw insights from experiences and lessons learned.

4.2.1 VCF Communities

- Due to the project, many changes have been noticed from the management of VCF. VCF has been taken under a management system by organizing and motivating community people. According to updated result framework of the CHTWCA, a total of 226 VCF management plan were prepared and implemented by community stakeholders with focus on sustainable forest landscapes in three HDCs (Annex 1).
- Among these VCF, some were under little or no management system, some were degraded due to illegal harvesting by outsiders and some were recently established. This explains that people are now more aware about forest conservation.
- The project through the VCF networks and management committees contributed to improving the co-management of VCFs and their associated micro-watersheds through consultations, training, exposure visits, policy advocacy, and other field activities including boundary demarcation, conflict resolution, etc.
- Community members now collectively benefit from the sale of bamboos, trees, bamboo shoots etc. The sale proceeds are used for everyday purposes (such as, Keyang) or distributed among the community members.
- VCF communities received different types of training, such as, poultry, pigeon, goat, pig rearing, vegetable gardening with improved seeds, bamboo production, climate change, forest and wildlife conservation, organizational development and financial management. They also received cash support, although minimal, that supported them to buy goat, poultry or improved seeds, which increased their income by rearing or gardening and selling in the market. After receiving the trainings, the beneficiaries are now more self-confident and self-defendant to earn their livelihoods and withstand any problematic time due to climate change impacts or disasters. They are more organized now and their dependency on forests is also reduced compared to previous time. They have secured their VCF by installing boundary pillars, reducing illegal harvesting by regular surveillance, measuring forest growth etc.
- The number of beneficiaries in the VCF community was small (25-40% of the total), financial assistance (Taka 2,200) was very little, no entertainment allowance for meetings etc. are some of the major drawbacks of the project as mentioned by the FGD respondents.
- Including all community people as beneficiaries, increasing financial assistance (at least to buy a cattle), continuing the training including veterinary, family planning, computer training, electrician training, cattle farming, fish farming, sewing, driving vehicles, involving youth and creating employment facilities, incorporating public health, education for all, stopping child marriage issues are some of the crucial suggestions given by the respondents for any future intervention.

4.2.2 Local Volunteer Mediator Forums (LVMFs)

- The project focused on strengthening of the existing LVMFs in Bandarban Hill District, establishing linkages with EU funded project and conducting refresher courses for the members of LVMFs on conservation conflict prevention and resolution, and peace building, dispute resolution, community mediation, conflict transformation and ecosystem conservation, Raising community awareness on social cohesion, gender, youth integrated with NRM and conservation, provide legal and case follow-up support to empower women and girl victims of Gender Based Violence (GBV), women trafficking and girl child marriages in the affected upazilas, support youth engagement for improved social cohesion and conservation through Upazila Championship Football Tournaments, support youth and girl engagement for improved social cohesion and conservation through Martial Art training and tournaments, support schools and colleges to organize cultural programmes by engaging diverse youth groups including girls on social cohesion and conservation activities, support schools and colleges in setting up debate clubs both for boy and girl students with capacity development on debating.
- LVMF committee members are trained on local conflict resolution, mediating with police and government officials, supporting poor people against any kind of law suits, maintaining peace and harmony in society, creating awareness among people not to commit any crime, etc.
- LVMFs has received wide acceptance by all through their contribution in women empowerment, supporting victims of GBV prevalent in the area (i.e., cases of physical and mental abuse by the husband. Some of these are related to dowry. The most serious is the kidnapping and rape-related cases that happened in that area), education, socio-economic and environmental development through karate training of women for self-defense, resolving conflicts through mediation among communities and people particularly, communal riots, land related conflicts, family issues between husband and wife, organizing annual football games for boys and girls at higher secondary level called “*Sports for Peace*”, organizing youth camps for students at school and college levels, debate competition at the secondary level, arranging inter-religious dialogues with people of all religions whose main aim is to maintain peace and harmony where the Moulana of the Muslims, the Brahmin of the Hindus, the Vante (Priest) of the Buddhists, the Father of the Christians are present.
- Lack of office premise for LVMFs to perform regular activities, meetings and resolving conflicts, mobile network problems, lack of fund to support people during disasters are some of the major challenges the LVMFs face.
- Continuation of training, resolving office premise problem, creating fund for LVMFs, resolving mobile network problems, extending activities of LVMFs at the union or upzila level, resolving conflicts between people and BFD by forming LVMFs near RFs, support from police and other law enforcing agencies etc. are some of the significant suggestions by the respondents to maintain peace and harmony at the community level.

4.3 Final Project Achievements

Figure 4.10 shows the map of the CHT with selected VCFs, RFs and PAs where CHTWCA activities have been implemented. Key achievements of the project received from the project office shows that most of the indicators set by the result framework resulted in more than expected (Table 4.15; Annex I). According to project reports and lessons learned document, key achievements of the project include stopping forestland loss in 226 VCFs (12,773 ha) by selecting, delineating and bringing under community management and plans by HDCs; headwater RFs (4,445 ha) brought into improved management by preparing and implementing Action Plan and IWMP by BFD; preparing management plans for 3 PAs (49,883 ha) by BFD; distributing 650,000 seedlings to households and institutions;

preparing CHT REDD+ Sub National Plan; assessment and implementation of value chain (Aarong, Grameen Phone-Future Nations, SAPLING etc.) for fisheries, tree nurseries, honey and other non-timber products, and weaving; training of BFD, HDCs and community members, supporting resilient livelihoods to 247,411 local people; providing water access to 11,140 local people through 144 GFS, 179 local people receiving GBV support; 795 local conflicts resolved through LVMFs; 180 girls trained in martial arts to increase self-confidence and strong (Table 4.15; Annex 1). Improved economic benefits assessment conducted by the project on 736 sampled beneficiaries suggests that male beneficiaries' income increased by 65%, while female beneficiaries experienced a 79% increase³.

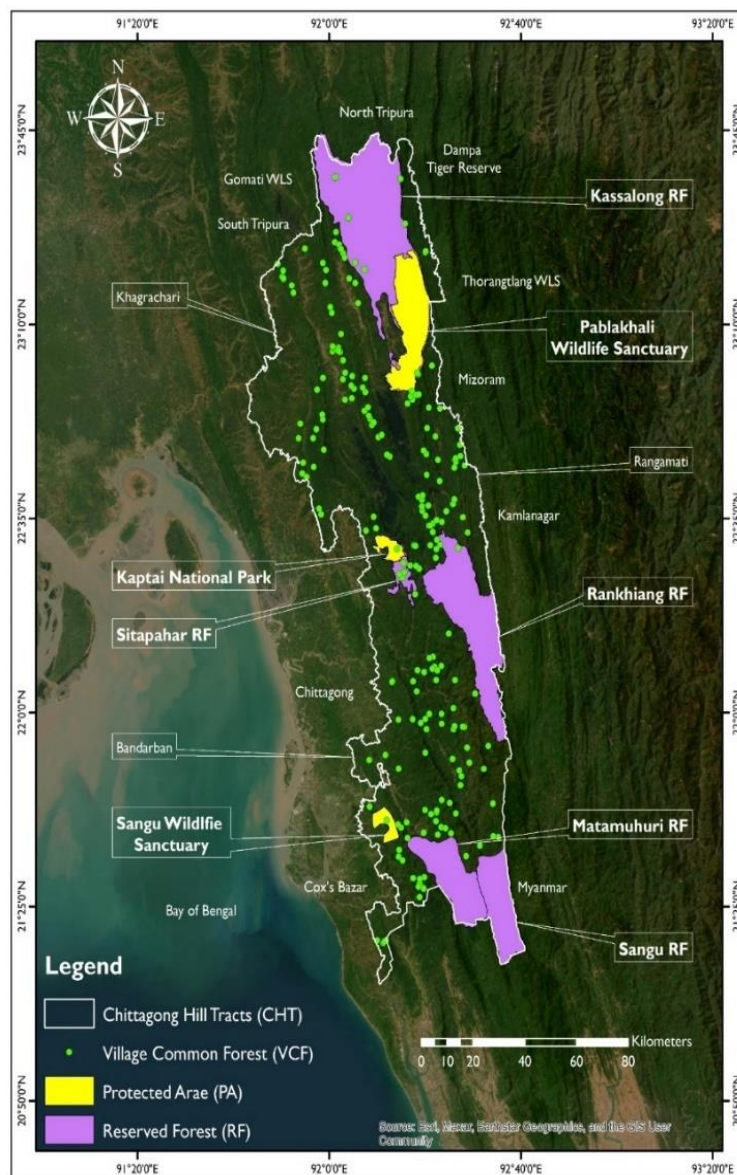


Figure 4.6: Map of the CHT showing CHTWCA project sites

³ Improved Economic Benefit Assessment Report, 2023. Report of the field survey conducted to assess the improved economic benefits of the respondent beneficiaries by the project in August 2023.

Table 4.15: Key achievements of CHTWCA according to main results (Source: CHTWCA Lessons Learned, 2023)

Result 1: Strengthened Ecosystem Governance	Key Achievements
Village Common Forests (VCFs)	Loss of forestland stopped: delineated & under community management and plans: 226 # covered - 12,773 hectares
Headwater Reserved Forests (RFs)	Policy finalized in PMO & implemented by BFD: 4,445 hectares
Protected Areas (PAs)	49,883 hectares (3 PAs)
Trained	422 BFD Officials on sustainable landscape management & CC adaptation
Tree seedlings raised and distributed for homesteads and institutions	CC mitigation & adaptation: 650,000 seedlings
Management Plans	Kaptai National Park, Sangu Wildlife Sanctuary, Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary, and Integrated Watershed Management Plan for Headwater Reserved Forests
Special Studies on Climate Change Mitigation	i) CHT REDD+ Sub-National Plan ii) REDD+ Environmental and Social Safeguards
Result 2: Resilient Livelihoods with Market Access Improved	Achievements
Value Chain Assessments & Implementation	Fisheries, tree nurseries, honey and other non-timber forest products, and weaving
Training for the Community Members	14,644 on resilient livelihoods, and 13,373 on climate change adaptation
Resilient Livelihoods	247,411 local people (includes COVID-19 assistance)
Access to Water	11,140 local people through 144 Gravity Flow System (GFS) system facilities
Improved market access/linkages established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AARONG: Weavers • Grameen Phone-Future Nations: Honey SAPLING: Local Business Advisors
Result 3: Reduced conflicts and improved social cohesion among communities for ecosystem conservation	Achievements (Host Community)
Social cohesion enhanced	Seven Local Volunteer Mediator Forums in influx affected Bandarban Hill District
Community initiatives/groups established	139 Community Institutions/Groups
Gender Based Violence	1,768 local people were provided services for reducing GBV
No. of Local Conflicts Mediated	795 local conflicts resolved locally through LVMFs
Girl Empowerment and Confidence Building	180 girls trained in Martial Arts. Some received international awards

4.4 Case Studies

4.4.1 Nomor Jib Chakma's Inspiring Journey: From Water Scarcity to Prosperity

In the remote village of Doluchori, nestled deep within the Rangamati district of Bangladesh, Nomor Jib Chakma and his family endured the harsh realities of life in an area plagued by water scarcity. Their struggles were compounded during the scorching summer months when the watershed ran dry, and even underground water sources were a rarity. Tragically, this dire situation led to the outbreak of waterborne diseases, causing immense suffering for the villagers. Nomor Jib (Figure 4.7), a resilient and determined man, was at the center of this struggle, providing for his family of six amidst these challenges.



Figure 4.7: Nomor Jib Chakma in his home garden

However, hope was on the horizon in the form of the UNDP's CHTWCA (Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-Management Activity) project. This transformative initiative aimed to uplift the lives of individuals like Nomor Jib, providing them with the tools and knowledge needed to break free from the vicious cycle of poverty.

Through the CHTWCA project, Nomor Jib received comprehensive training in various critical areas. He gained expertise in watershed management, equipping him with the skills to manage and conserve this precious resource effectively. VCF (Village Common Forest) restoration training was another vital component, fostering an understanding of the importance of communal efforts in safeguarding local forests and ecosystems. Wildlife conservation and climate awareness training rounded out his education, imparting valuable knowledge that would benefit both his family and the environment.

The project didn't stop at training; it provided Nomor Jib with crucial livelihood support. Armed with newfound knowledge and support, he embarked on a journey to improve his family's economic prospects. With determination and vision, he invested the cash support from the project in one hen and one goat and within short period of time his investment turned into 13 hens and 7 goats (Figure 4.8). Through diligent care and hard work, he managed to sell 2 of the goats, realizing an income of 16,000 Taka. This influx of income marked a turning point in his family's life, allowing them to aspire to

a better future. He is also expecting to sell 4 baby goats during the next festive time with high price and more income.



Figure 4.8. Nomor Jib Chakma with his goats and hens.

Nomor Jib's ambitions extended beyond livestock. He wisely utilized a portion of his land to create a thriving vegetable garden. Additionally, he ventured into turmeric cultivation and pineapple farming, diversifying his income sources further and contributing to the local agricultural landscape. These initiatives not only bolstered his family's financial stability but also improved food security within the community.

The CHTWCA project's impact wasn't limited to Nomor Jib's individual success. Through concerted efforts and community engagement, the VCF was successfully restored. The once-dry watershed now brimmed with water even during the harshest dry seasons. This transformation not only revitalized agriculture in the region but also eliminated the looming threat of waterborne diseases, improving the overall well-being of the community.

Nomor Jib Chakma's journey is a testament to the power of community-driven initiatives, education, and resilience. With unwavering determination and the support of the CHTWCA project, he not only conquered the adversity of water scarcity but also paved the way for a brighter future for himself and his family in the picturesque hills of Doluchori. His children now had access to education, breaking free from the constraints of limited opportunities that had once held his family back. As they moved forward, they were not just survivors of adversity but ambassadors of change, inspiring hope and transformation in their community.

Nomor Jib Chakma's success story serves as a shining example of how targeted projects and engaged communities can turn the tide in the face of adversity, ultimately leading to a better quality of life for all. Through resilience, education, and community spirit, Nomor Jib and his family emerged from the depths of poverty and water scarcity to a life of prosperity, setting a path for a brighter future for generations to come.

CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The holistic approach for the strengthened ecosystem governance, resilient livelihoods and conflict resolution through capacity development of institutions and communities, empowerment of women, girls and disadvantaged people of CHT through skill development and awareness creation trainings, community mobilization and social mediation are showing early positive signs in the domains of outcomes. The community is more aware, confident and interested in conserving their watersheds and forests for better water security and ecosystem services, withstand harsh or difficult situations, raise voices against violence or injustice, and improve social cohesion. On the other hand, the CHT government institutions, particularly HDCs and BFD, are now more capacitated and ready to involve community people in natural resource management (VCF/USFs, RFs, PAs) as no resource can be efficiently managed without their active involvement. For these, policy decisions are important, such as, revisions of Forest Act 1927, Social Forestry Rules 2004, Wildlife (Conservation Security) Act 2012 etc. to accommodate or mitigate the prevailing conflicts related to land and natural resource management in the CHT. The project has achieved many positive outcomes as per the result framework. Still, the extent and coverage of the project was too small to cover all of the CHT and get the desired benefits. So, it will be worth extending the project life for another period with an increased budget and scaled-up activities. At the same time series of policy level dialogues involving all stakeholders mediated by UNDP at both local and national levels could help both government and traditional institutions and the community people to better manage the natural resources (such as, micro-watersheds, forests etc.) for economic, social and environmental benefits.

5.2 Recommendations

1. The Government should take necessary steps for the full implementation of the CHT Accord 1997 and empowering different institutions (CHTRC, HDCs etc.) through democratic elections, activating Land Commission to resolve all land-related disputes; extending government sponsored social safety net programmes all over the CHT; appointing Forest Settlement Officers (FSOs) by the Deputy Commissioners in three Hill Districts as per the existing laws to settle all land-related disputes or conflicts between BFD and local communities; mainstreaming and acknowledging VCFs by the HDCs as mandated by the Hill District Council Acts 1989 for legal support.
2. The Government should also take necessary steps to reform Forest Act 1927 to make it more people-friendly and with the provision to de-reserve RFs where human settlements have received state recognition by the establishment of Union Parishad (UP), no new declaration of RFs should be made in the CHT, encroachment of RFs and PAs (for settlement, jhum, business, tourism etc.) should be strictly prohibited, and RFs and PAs lands shouldn't be leased in any circumstances in the name of development; the needs of the communities residing inside the RFs and PAs should be considered; formulation of Village Forest Rules to facilitate participatory management of portions of RFs through assignment of rights to village communities in the RFs⁴; Social Forestry Rules 2004 need to be adapted to suit the conditions of CHT in consultation with different stakeholders.
3. The Government should resolve all land dispute issues by controlling land mafia or elite capture; land leasing (USF lands) should be discouraged as far as possible, however, if necessary local people should be given priority and outsiders should not be considered; land zoning is necessary to create

⁴ Roy, R. D. 2016. Sustainable Forest Management in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Report of an Independent Expert Commissioned by UNDP under CHTWCA, UNDP-CHTDF, Rangamati, Chittagong Hill Tracts

zones for jhum, conservation, settlements, tree and bamboo growing zones, fruit orchards, root crops, bananas etc.; creation of core zones (no activity zone) and buffer zones (co-management activity zone) in RFs and PAs; jhum or any unsustainable land use should be strictly controlled in RFs and PAs.

4. UNDP country office should organize policy dialogue at the national levels to review conflicting laws, policies, regulations and suggest revisions that suit CHT situations; should secure external fundings to support project-based activities in the CHT; and should liaise with different government institutions working in the CHT to create a congenial environment for the project and for the wellbeing of the people, the community and the environment.
5. The project should include local leaders in the stakeholder list (Chairman, Member, Headman, Karbari etc.); traditional institutions (Circle Chief, Headmen, Karbaries) to be engaged in the project interventions; consult people at the root-level first before involving them in any development or conservation activity; and giving priority to women, widows, old people, poor, disadvantaged groups, youths etc.
6. The project may extend livelihood trainings (at least two-day intensive training) to cover more AIGAs as per the local demand; increase cash support to buy at least a cow; extend GBV support in Rangamati and Khagrachari along with Bandarban to reach all victims; water available through GFS system are not safe to drink, so it is important to resolve safe drinking water crisis; check dams were found helpful for the people and wildlife, so check dams should be continued; cost estimation in preparing budget should be realistic considering remoteness and communication problems; fund disbursement should be timely.
7. The project may continue supporting ANR system in RFs and PAs with the provision of employing 'Watcher' and increasing logistic support like motorbike, speed boat, fuel, TA/DA etc.; creation of awareness on conservation of watersheds, forests and biodiversity, and climate change including young people; identification and conservation of degraded watersheds for water security.
8. The project may support ecotourism development in RFs and PAs with the help of BFD involving local community people to support conservation, local people and their culture as well as in traditional lands (e.g., USFs) with the help of HDCs and Circles
9. The project may introduce payment for ecosystem services (PES) technique to encourage community people to conserve forests (VCFs, RFs, PAs etc.) using REDD+ or other means; and bringing forest-dependent people under cash or food assistance during draught season; wildlife conservation should also get priority in the CHT.
10. The project may support academic research on sustainable jhum and agriculture, ecotourism development, land use zoning, forest carbon measurement, REDD+, assessment of payment for ecosystem services (PES) etc. to devise new and improved tools and interventions.

CHAPTER 6 : INSIGHTS ON THE THEORY OF CHANGE & LESSON LEARNED

6.1 Insights on the Theory of Change

CHTWCA's theory of change or development hypothesis states that if local communities are capacitated to improve the governance of natural resources in the CHT through an integrated management and gender-sensitive approach, then the resilience of natural ecosystems and communities will improve and the potential for conflict will reduce. For this a set of activities and output were implemented in identified watersheds in partnerships with the CHT institutions, leaders and communities, and government agencies (BFD of MOEFCC, and the three HDCs of MOCHTA) to address a series of short, medium and long-term issues related to forest development and governance of natural resources in the CHT. The underlying premise is that economic self-reliance will empower both men and women and make them confident to cope with difficult situations while reducing their dependency on forests and biodiversity. Without alternative income-generating and market-oriented skills, they would not have been able to make life choices on their own. Therefore, by design, the project appears well structured to achieve its objectives.

The project has systematically organized its activities with the overall goal of strengthening gender responsive local resilience through an integrated ecosystem management approach of the CHT and also with the purpose of strengthened capacity to protect and manage the natural ecosystems of the CHT. To achieve the goal and purpose, the project implemented all its activities based on 3 main results and 8 interim results which were centered towards achieving 18 indicators under a preset result framework. The result framework shows that the project was successful to implement gender-responsive interventions giving more or less equal opportunity and in some cases more to the women beneficiaries with a range between 33-53% in all its activities (Table 4.13; Appendix 1).

The summative review of the project shows that the project had a number of dimensions that are aligned with the theory of change. While the decision-makers at the policy and strategic level acknowledge the significance of linking the capacity development of communities and institutions with strengthened ecosystem governance, providing resilient livelihoods with improved market access and reducing conflicts and improving social cohesion to conserve degraded watersheds and headwater RFs for better ecosystem services (water security, livelihoods etc.). The result of the project also shows a positive change in the mind of the local communities as well as the officials of different government institutions (HDCs and BFD) for creating awareness for the harmful impact (e.g., water scarcity) of widespread natural resource degradation in the CHT. With different skill development trainings, awareness creation activities, livelihood support, community mobilization (e.g., group formation) and conflict resolution (such as, boundary demarcation, GBV, conflicts between groups or communities etc.) the community people are now more confident to manage their degraded watersheds and forests better, earn their livelihoods from several income generating activities and thereby reducing their dependency on the natural resources (mainly forests). In addition to that the effort towards organizing communities to create awareness against gender-based violence and to take measures for prevention and for acting against the perpetrators through legal means; has made a sense of community-based collective empowerment among women, girls and other disadvantaged groups in the society. Therefore, the key assumptions behind the project design are based on the valid premise.

6.2 Lesson Learned

- Participatory forest ecosystem restoration is possible for providing water security in the CHT (policy makers, donors, communities)
- Restoration of degrading forest micro-watersheds regenerates encompassing water bodies and aquifer (policy makers, donors, communities)
- Active involvement of local people in participatory forest restoration is critical. Need regular policy dialogue involving government, non-government and community-based stakeholders. Trust building will reduce the gaps between communities and BFD (government agencies, CHTWCA implementing authority)
- Integrate micro-watershed management approach to enable integrated ecosystem management in identified landscapes (CHTWCA implementing authority)
- Sustain and upscale integrated forest ecosystem management by building the capacity of diverse communities and government agencies (UNDP)
- Post-conflict situation, multi-institutions and responsibilities, poverty and unemployment, over-dependence on land-based resources, unclear land-tenures, poor communication should be given priority in the CHT (policy makers, government agencies)
- People are more aware of climate change, wildlife, forests, biodiversity conservation and watershed management (policy makers, UNDP)
- Poverty reduction is possible through the interventions implemented by the project (policy makers, UNDP)
- Sustainable livelihood options are needed ((UNDP)
- Community mobilization (such as, group formation, school-based or social groups), capacity development, and livelihood support have created a working environment that made people more confident and fearless (policy makers, UNDP)
- Created an opportunity for increased public connection (UNDP)
- Women and disadvantaged groups are empowered (UNDP)
- Reduced forest dependency with capacity-building training (policy makers, UNDP)
- Need training on more livelihood options as per local demand, such as, cattle farming, skill development on computer, driving, mobile, electrical and electronics, marketing strategy etc. (UNDP)
- Consultation at the root level is necessary (CHTWCA implementing authority)
- Better management of VCF with management plan and mainstreaming of VCF for wider acceptance (government agencies)
- Conflict resolution helps establish peace and harmony in the CHT (CHTWCA implementing authority)
- Agro-based businesses with improved market access will reduce dependency on forests (UNDP)