

# Empowering Marginalised People of the Chittagong Hill Tracts through Advocacy

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Bwam community woman, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

**The Chittagong Hill Tracts, located in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh, differ from the rest of the country because of its mountainous geography and the existence of 11 ethnic and indigenous communities, each with its own distinct lifestyle and culture.**

Since time immemorial this region has been contributing significantly to the economy and the nation's image through its abundant natural resources and rich indigenous culture and heritage. However, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is one of the poorest areas in Bangladesh and prone to political instability. The effective role of local government institutions is crucial, but has always been a subject of controversy because of their non-accountability, lack of commitment, poor efficiency, and lack of transparency.

The NGO Green Hill has come to realise that without improvements in governance from local institutions and other relevant actors, development interventions will not generate sustainable impacts in the CHT. The application of appropriate advocacy tools and techniques can help improve the state of local governance in CHT, and civil society organisations play a crucial role. The wider scope of advocacy is to empower marginalised communities to ensure their

basic human rights and at the same time facilitate local government institutions and others to address community rights more effectively and with greater transparency and accountability. With this perspective in mind, WaterAid Bangladesh and CARE, since 1999 and with the support of Action Aid Bangladesh, has been focusing their efforts on specific issues of marginalised communities. Green Hill has achieved remarkable success in improving the quality of education, access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and in diversifying market days to help farmers and producers get fair prices for their agricultural produce as well as improving access to rehabilitation for fisherfolk communities. Based on this success, and also considering other challenges, Green Hill has learnt that there is greater scope for advocacy initiatives in the CHT.

As one of the strategic partners of ICIMOD in Bangladesh, Green Hill (GH) along with some local organisations participated in the regional 'Training

of Trainers' (ToT) in Advocacy Strategies in 2005. Participation in the ToT has enhanced the organisation's capacity for advocacy and has deepened the confidence of its members. Accordingly, GH and ICIMOD agreed to organise local level advocacy training activities. The aim is to strengthen the capacity of local organisations in advocacy tools and techniques so that they can play an important role in empowering the marginalised communities they work with. Advocacy training can also contribute to improving governance of local institutions and other actors.

## Training on advocacy tools and techniques



Lal Chhuak Liana Pangkhua

The opening ceremony of an advocacy training workshop in Bandarban district.

With support from ICIMOD and in joint collaboration with local partners ALO, Aga Khan School, and the Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resources Network (HIMAWANTI), Green Hill organised five training programmes in the three hill districts of the CHT from December 2005 to November 2006. Altogether participants from 18 organisations have been trained. The last was a training of trainers (ToT) workshop with participants who have attended four previous training workshops.

**Participation in training has enhanced Green Hill's capacity for advocacy and has deepened the confidence of its members.**

The training methodology included a mix of lecture-presentations, group discussion, role playing, field exposure visits to a community, and ample feedback sessions. Group presentations were documented in video for the participants to review and analyse afterwards.

## Lessons learned

- › In training, selection of the right participants is crucial. Organise ToT on Advocacy for participants who have received previous training; they can build on previous knowledge and be part of a 'training pool' which can pass on the training they receive to other grassroots groups.
- › Organise training programmes on advocacy at the grassroots level; a needs-based modular course of three to five days may be more effective, with sufficient time for discussion and presentations on important topics.
- › Provide separate training for participants of different backgrounds, such as for NGOs, CBOs, journalists, network/forum, women development organisations, local government institutions, and others.
- › Develop case studies relevant to CHT through research and short film demonstrations; video demonstrations of relevant case studies and role-playing and games are more effective for learning than purely thematic discussions.
- › Develop a handbook for local trainers as appropriate for CHT-based trainers.
- › Develop a network or forum and take on joint advocacy initiatives with network partners.



Nripane Chakma

A field visit to Bhuban Mohon Karbari Para, Sadar Upazila, Khagrachari district was a part of the Training of Trainers course on Advocacy.



## A network or forum that will take on the practical challenges and opportunities to exchange learning will strengthen the community empowerment process.



Sanjay Madnani

A puppet show in Bangladesh: Alternative media is a creative advocacy tool that is very effective in getting community attention.

Despite limitations, the participants liked the training course because of its broader scope. The participants and the training's local administration also liked the participation of non-indigenous participants from various organisations.

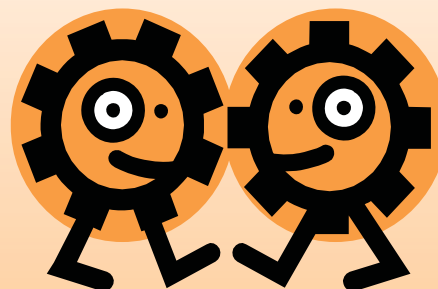
### Outputs

- › Of the total participants to the training programmes, a high 97% claim to have gained comprehensive knowledge on advocacy concept, strategies, tools and techniques.
- › Seventy percent of the participants have been identified as having the promising potential to conduct training at the grassroots level and can empower marginalised communities and conduct policy advocacy.
- › After training, participants have become more confident, interested, and committed to contribute to future advocacy training programmes. Everyone received a copy of Advocacy Bangla
- › CD and video-cassette copies of group presentations and facilitation – particularly on facilitation as a learning tool – are available for those who wish to use these tools in future training programmes.

### Some observations

The local administration in CHT, the hill district council, civil society, and the political parties have all expressed appreciation for the advocacy training programme and have suggested that it be made a continuing initiative, pledging to extend their best possible cooperation. The participants also expressed keen interest in a network or forum that will take into account the practical challenges and opportunities to exchange learning and strengthen the community empowerment process. In the process of advocacy training the organisational capacity of Green Hill and other organisations has been enhanced, in keeping with the NGO's effort to empower marginalised communities in CHT. Training has added value to and boosted the confidence of marginalised, poor communities and rekindled in them a new hope. Green Hill appreciates the collaboration with ICIMOD and other regional partners in the Advocacy project and vows to support future advocacy and training activities.

**Two heads are better than one  
except when they don't share information**



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