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### **BANGLADESH**

#### **The Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB)**

A particular focus for CCDB has been work on women's empowerment and ensuring women are not left out of community decision making



processes. CCDB has been addressing this through the formation of 'People's Forums' throughout the country. These women-led organisations develop economic activities and mobilise whole communities for development, placing women at the forefront of the process. Most of these forums have around 100 or more female members, with a president, secretary and treasurer. As such women are the key driving force behind the forums, and with some assistance from CCDB, organise major activities, such as livelihoods projects, disaster risk and reduction, and social protection initiatives.

Moni Sarder married in 1989. Back then the land was productive, and there were large fish in local rivers. Her family lived well from what they grew on their land, and from fishing in rivers. After six or seven years, she recalls things started to change: water became saline, river banks were eroded, and temperatures rose; there were more frequent cyclones, tornadoes, and higher tides, all of which had a devastating impact on people's livelihoods.

Moni has been very active in her forum, motivating other members and organising links with union parishads to implement community adaptation activities such as rainwater collection systems, and improved health services.

She is now a member of the local government parishad union budget committee, which advocates for women and poor people in the village. Moni feels it was her participation in the forum and village

adaptation activities that gave her the confidence to participate in the budget committee.

CCDB considers its work through forums to have been a success, with many women feeling more confident and that their voice is being heard. They have opportunities to participate in decision making and see this as a real achievement in their lives. CCDB itself has noted the network of forums to be an emerging social force within Bangladesh capable, it believes, of seeing significant change in the lives of women.

### **ZIMBABWE**

This blog entry by Robin Gray is from the Commitment for Life trip to Zimbabwe in May. Other contributions can be read at [www.cforl.org.uk](http://www.cforl.org.uk).

#### **Leading by example**

On day 2 we visited projects run by the Dabane Trust. It confirmed for me from day 1 how important women are in rural communities and how such projects are aiding their empowerment. This was exemplified by the numbers who were members of the garden projects, but also the particular case of Mrs Pauline Ndlovu. She had not only adopted conservation methods of farming and planted drought resistant crops, but was also a member of the Matshetshe Food Processing Centre. Her lead was now being followed by her neighbours.

Those projects funded by Christian Aid were clearly very highly valued, as shown by the warmth of the welcome from everyone we met. In the drought-prone areas people were barely subsisting and changing farming practice through the application of technical know-how and the installation of things like solar pumps, pipes and storage tanks, for example, were making a real difference to small rural communities.

As a result, farmers were not only able to buy more basic household goods but, most importantly, were able to pay the fees and send their children to school.

The day also brought home to me the importance of choosing the right local partners. By the judicious use of relatively small sums, Christian Aid's current partners are able to secure long-term improvements in the lives of hard-pressed rural villagers.

Initially, I had two concerns as we moved around. They were the apparent reluctance of some farmers to switch to drought resistant crop varieties and the extent to which the schemes we saw were one-offs and not being replicated. However, my doubts were dispelled during the day by seeing whole communities coming together and many learning from others or from their neighbours, including the example of Pauline Ndlovu mentioned above.

Robin Gray, Woking URC

## CENTRAL AMERICA

**Honduras:** Traditional 'slash and burn' agriculture is practiced throughout the tropics and accounts for millions of tonnes of carbon being released into the atmosphere every year, significantly contributing to [global warming](#).

'Slash and burn is estimated to release twice as much carbon into the atmosphere each year as all the air travel around the world.'

In [Honduras](#), Christian Aid supports OCDIH, the Christian Organisation for Integrated Development in Honduras which encourages farmers to adopt more environmentally-friendly techniques.

By demonstrating how to plant food crops between Inga and other tree species and training in the use of organic fertilisers, OCDIH, has helped hundreds of small farmers to increase their incomes and yields, enabling them to buy more land and raise livestock, which also improves their diet.

**El Salvador** is a small but densely populated country of roughly 6.2 million people, located on the Pacific coast of Central America. A few years ago, the UN Climate Change Office rated the country the most vulnerable in the world, with 80% of its territory reported as being at risk. However, climate change is only one of the many sustainable development challenges

currently faced by the people of El Salvador. Although the UN peace accords, which brought a formal close to the country's long-running civil war, came into effect in 1992, El Salvador is still deeply marked by its history of conflict. The long-term effects of the structural injustice and high levels of poverty which formed the background to the conflict are still being played out in its aftermath. Land polluted by pesticides, a threatened coastline, youth gang violence, interrupted education, unemployment, culturally embedded gender inequality, and persistent violence against women are only some of the additional challenges faced by those who are trying to rebuild their land.

Jiquilisco Bay, on the southern coast, is where PROCARES is working with the communities resettled here at the end of the conflict, as they continue to address these challenges. PROCARES stands for Programme for Capacity-Building and Reconstruction in El Salvador. Even before the war had ended, while thousands had taken refuge from the conflict in neighbouring countries, PROCARES stood in solidarity with the refugees, helping them to address issues of livelihood, education, and stability while they were still in exile.

When the conflict finally came to an end, they were ready, and better-equipped, to reclaim hope, and so began the long walk home. Some of the returned refugees were resettled in Jiquilisco Bay, with international (including EU) support. In the face of severe climate volatility, ongoing coastal erosion, and ruined infrastructure, this new community began to reclaim the land, and along with it, their own future.

A Disaster Risk Reduction programme, coordinated early on by PROCARES, has provided some stability, with the establishment of weather monitoring stations and early warning systems. Mangrove preservation and reforestation campaigns are ongoing, not least because mangrove forests provide a strong defence against the wave surges of tropical storms. Perhaps the most important long-term challenge facing the people of Jiquilisco Bay, however, is that of establishing a local, sustainable, low-carbon economy, so that they can provide a livelihood for themselves and continue to build their community infrastructure.

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