

LIFE HISTORY OF RITI CHING MARMA

Shiree Q2 Research on Extreme Poverty in Bangladesh					
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Household ID					
Interviewee name	Riti Ching Marma	Sex	Female	Age	32
Ethnicity and religion	Marma, Buddhist				
Livelihood before the intervention	Agricultural Labourer				
Well- being Status before the intervention	Working Extreme poor				
Marital status, children and other household members	Married, lives with husband and two child				
Village, union, upazilla and Zilla	Thana Para , Ruma Sadar , Ruma , Bandarban				
Dates of Interview	16.04.2012				
Keywords	Polygamy, Gambling husband, careless husband				

INTRODUCTION

Riti Ching Marma was born in 1979 at Ruma Upazila of Bandarban District into a working extreme poor family. Her father was a jum cultivator and an occasional agricultural labourer. He had no cultivable land, but cultivated jum on other people's agricultural land. He also had no homestead land and the family house was built on occupied land. Riti's mother was a house wife. She had six sisters and no brothers, although her eldest sister died when Rita was still very young. Riti did not get admitted into school as her father and mother did not pressure her to get an education. However her four younger sisters received primary level education. She took care of them when they were children.

Riti is now 32 years old and lives with her husband Thouai Thouai Mong (40) and their two children. Riti is uneducated and works as a jum cultivator as well as a day labourer. Her husband is an occasional agricultural labourer. He is also a gambling addict and whenever he gets cash he wastes it gambling with other gamblers. He does not support his family sully, despite being the household head. Initially after their marriage Thouai did care for his family, but gradually he got caught up with gambling and became careless. Usually, in indigenous societies extreme poor housewives are only involved in income generating activities when there are serious unmet needs and the major liabilities are the responsibility of the husband.

WELL- BEFORE THE SHIREE INTERVENTION

Indicator	Just before the intervention
Well-being category	Working Extreme Poor.
Diets	Two meals a day consisting of rice with seasonal vegetables. Sometimes they collect jungle leaves from the forest or have water rice & chilli chatni. In a month they take dry fish as protein 2 to 3 days. In the last year they have eaten pig meat once a day.
Livelihoods now - in terms of contribution to that years' income For other principal adult	Riti Ching Marma 1. Agricultural labourer Husband: Thouai Thouai Mong

member	1.Occasional agricultural labourer
Productive assets now rank them in terms of value (e.g. land, livestock, rickshaws),	n/a
House and homestead: ownership, condition of tenure, condition of house.	Live in a house on 2 decimals of land that belongs to her father. They built the house which is 15 x 13.5 feet. This is made from coarse mat made of bamboo slips & a straw roof

LIFE HISTORY NARRATIVE

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH 1979- 1996

Riti Ching Marma was born in 1979 into a working extreme poor family. She lived with her mother and father and had five sisters. Her father was a jhum cultivator but had no cultivable land but cultivated unclaimed land wherever he could find it. He also had no homestead land and they lived on occupied land. Her mother was a house wife as she had six children within a very short interval and so was too busy caring for them to go out to work.

Rita's father and mother did not encourage her to go to school and instead she was involved in household work from the age of 12. When she got to the age of 14 she also went to help her father in jum cultivation. Her childhood was not a very happy time as her father was not able to meet the needs of the family.

The family could only afford to eat two meals a day during her childhood due to the high dependency ratio. However during their adolescence because they had got involved in jum cultivation, the household could afford three meals a day. The food menu everyday consisted of rice with seasonal vegetable like eggplant, tomato, bean, potato, Suet gourd etc. Sometimes they collected food from the forest area. They could only afford fish, meat and other specific food items once or twice a year during festivals. On two or three days a month they had dry fish, which they purchased from the market. As there were six sisters and most of them were involved in jum cultivation on self-cultivated land from the age of 14 or 15 they did not have to

work elsewhere as day labourers. The family did not suffer any food crisis but other basic needs like clothes were not affordable.

MARRIED LIFE AND EARLY ADULTHOOD 1996- 2012

In 1996 at the age of 17 years Riti got married to Thouai Thouai Mong, who was 28 years old. Thouai did not organize any wedding celebration because he had told Riti's family that he was born in Myanmar and only came to Bangladesh a year ago for work. As wedding gifts from Thouai, Riti only received dresses. Riti's marriage to Thouai was an arranged marriage but they also fell in love. He told the family that if they gave him shelter he would stay with them. At that time Riti's parents believed him and offered him shelter so after their marriage the couple lived on Riti's father's occupied land and built a house.

Riti has children

In 1997 Riti gave birth to their first son. All the family members were very happy because there had been no males in their family. However, three months later her son had a serious fever attack and because the household could not get treatment for him, the baby died within three days. A year later she gave birth to a daughter, but just days later this baby also died. They were unable to diagnosis what problem caused the baby to die, but said that she cried constantly.

In year 2000 she gave birth to another son, U Ko Nu, who is now 11 years old and studying in class five. In 2002 she had a fourth child, a daughter named La Khoi Ching. This daughter is now nine years old and studying in class three. Riti is able to send her daughter to school because they get a stipend 125 taka per month which they receive in 6 month intervals. The stipend is used for family consumption purpose or to purchase education materials e.g. khata, pencils.

All of Riti's children were born in their house with the assistance of an experienced local elderly female (Dhai). There is a tradition that when the household can afford it, the Dhai should be given clothes, or good food to thank her for her services. However, because their first two children died early due to health shock they did not need to provide this for Dhai. Riti and her husband only paid medical expenses for the last two children, which cost about 200 taka each.

Riti engaged in Day laboring as husband withdrew support

In 2002, after the birth of her fourth child Riti observed that her husband started contributing less to the family, despite the fact that there was no job scarcity in the

area at the time. Riti heard from a reliable source that her husband had been involved in gambling. She observed his activities and realized that he was not working regularly and noticed that his earnings had reduced from 1000 taka per month (12-13 days' work at 80 taka per day) to just 400 to 500 taka (only 5-6 days' work). He also started coming home for work late at night drunk and became involved in gambling. This decrease in the household's income reduced their well-being status from (3) to (2). Riti said nothing about this to her husband because she was worried about what would happen if she left him or got angry because she had no one else to rely on. Her father was not well-off and as she had five sisters, the dependency ratio in their household was already high. She felt that her situation would only deteriorate if she tried to change it.

Instead, Riti slowly began taking full responsibility for running the family with her children. She started working as an agricultural labourer from 2002, doing 10 to 12 days per month on average.

Box 1: Inflation

When Riti first started working she only got 50 taka per day (500 -600/- taka per month) but since last year she has been getting 120 to 150/- taka per day. However inflation rates have been high since then, and previously rice was only 20 taka per kg whereas now it is 35-40 taka. Other essential products have also increased in price by about 100 to 200percent, and so providing for her family is still very challenging.

Riti does around eight hours of Joyaal labour a day, 12-15 days a month, for which she now gets a monthly average income of about 1800/- taka. She uses this money to provide for her family. Her husband works occasionally as a day labourer but after he gets his wages he contributes very little to the household (200 to 300 taka) and instead goes gambling and drinks rice wine.

Box 2: Alcohol consumption

Excessive alcohol consumption can be a gendered problem in communities across the CHT. The role of alcohol depends on the specific religious and cultural norms of a community, though traditionally is used by both men and women in annual and seasonal festivals such as *Bizu*, *Sangrai* and *Boishu*. It is also consumed during other special occasions such as welcoming a guest to the house, the arrival a new household member, or in entertainment.

Alcohol is produced locally within households and communities and some perceive its production and consumption to be increasingly. Though consumed by both men and

women, it is rare for women to do so, and excessive consumption is linked to domestic violence.

Death of Mother and Sisters' Marriages

Riti's mother died in 2001 when she began suffering from a disease. Although her father got treatment for her, they were unable to save her. Her father was alone and deeply traumatized by her death.

By 2002 all of Riti's sisters had got married and subsequently went to live with their husband's families, none of which are nearby. Although they are all doing moderately well in comparison, due to this distance she is unable to get support from them.

Support from UP

In 2007 Riti started to receive some UP relief on a yearly basis in the form of ten kilo of rice. In year 2009 she also got a VGD card as part of the Government safety net support programme. With this she got 30 kilo of rice per month which she consumed with her husband and children. She got this for two years, but it stopped in 2011. After that the family did not get any food or material support from Union Parishad. For this she did not pay any bribe to UP secretary, member/ chairman.

As a VGD beneficiary, she got access to weekly savings services (50 taka a week) which were collected by Concern, an NGO. She managed to save 1,200 taka which still remain in her Concern NGO account.

Father moves to live with sister

In 2011 Riti's father went to live with her younger sister and gave his home to Riti. They renovated the house and stayed there.

The new house has no toilet and they have to bathe in Sangu River. The household members collect drinking water from a tube-well which was installed through a Government initiative.

Riti discovers her husband's Polygamy

Riti realized that her husband's behaviour started to change after 2004. He started staying away from the house for significant periods of time, and once he left for one month without informing her in advance. The first time he said he had been away for work reasons but did not come back with any extra income to contribute to the household's income. Thouai did this two to three times a year.

In 2010, Riti heard from a woman of Paindu union that she was also married to Thouai and that she was his third wife. However, that woman said that she left him when she found out that he was involved in polygamy.

In 2011 Riti bought a new Thami (a kind of lungi) to wear to a function held to celebrate the anniversary of a religious leader. She looked for it to stitch it and when she asked her husband if he had seen it, he replied that he had given it to another of his wives. At first she did not believe him and thought he was joking, but when the lungi did not appear, she took him seriously. After the Thami went missing Riti looked into this with this other woman and found that Thouai had another two wives. The first one lives at Alikadam upazilla, and the second one in Lama upazilla.

Two months ago, Thouai left the house for a month and denied the existence of other wives, but Riti refused to believe him. However, she did not query him because she felt that if she accuses him, he may abandon her for good. Though currently Riti struggles to maintain her family, sometimes her husband does contribute some financial support to the family, an average of 500 taka per month. This is better than nothing, and Riti also feels more secure if her husband stays with her. As she is a young female she fears physical assault when her husband is away, although she has not previously been subjected to any such situation. She hopes that her husband may change and give her support like he used to after they got married.

Support from Neighbours

Riti's husband is not very supportive so when she faced crisis in the past she has been able to rely on support from her neighbours. For example when she has diarrhoea or fever and needs money to pay for treatment, the neighbours are happy to give her a small loan of 300- 500 taka. If Riti is unable to go to buy the medicine herself then neighbours are happy to go to buy it for her.

CONCLUSION

Riti Ching Marma is now living with her two children and her careless and reliable husband who rarely contributes to the household's income. Because of her husband's behaviour and addiction to gambling, her well-being varied tremendously after her marriage. Though she benefitted from the School Stipend for her children and some support from the Union Parishad and the community, her income remain low and her food habits rather poor.

Riti is 32 years old, and although she still lives with her husband Thouai (40) and their two children she has to labour and earn money herself in order to meet her household's basic needs. She works as a jum cultivator and as an agricultural day labourer on other people's lands. Her marriage does not offer her the space and the stability she needs to improve her well-being and the well-being of her children. As an extreme poor working woman, her opportunities to work are limited and the income she receives is much lower than that of male workers.

She said that she feels anxious about her children's future life, and is desperate to do the best for them. Her children are enrolled in school and she focuses her dreams and aspiration on her son. She wants, by any means possible, to send her son to higher education which will enable him to get a better job when he is older and allow him to secure a good income. She thinks that any support she gets from the Government through the Union Parishad or other NGOs, such as a small business or livestock, may make it easier for her family to survive and prosper in the future.

SEASONAL LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITY MAP

The table below shows the available work opportunities in Riti's locality over the course of the year:

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
jum				Cut jungle and prepare jum land for sowing jum Cultivation of ginger, Turmeric, Arum etc.)			Minor work on own jum land vegetable cultivation (e.g. eggplant, Chilli) and weed of jum crop This is basically lean season			jum harvest		
Wage labour	Tobacco Cultivation					Paddy sowing			Paddy harvest	Tobacco Cultivation Harvest Potato		
Income	Income from labour			No income		Income from paddy labour	No income		Income from paddy harvest	Income from tobacco cultivation and potato harvest		

There are different work opportunities available at different times of the year.

Here it should be noted that jum paddy is major crop in CHT. The cultivators don't sale the paddy but consume it themselves. Some amount they hoard it for next year's seed. However other jum products such as vegetables and spices they take to sell in the market.

LIFE HISTORY MAP

Dates	Well-being movement	Reasons
1979-1990	2	Born into a poor family with a high dependency ratio. Only had 2 meals up until the age of 12 years,
1991-1996	Move up to 3	The 6 sisters started earning from jum cultivation and so the family could have 3 meals a day.
1996-2002	Remained 3	She got married and lived with her husband in his father's house. Husband and wife were earning so they had 3 meals a day and can meet other necessary expenses
2003-2008	Moved down to 2	Riti's husband began to stop taking care of his family.
2009-2011	Remained 2	Gets VGD card for two years valid up to 2011 from Union Parishad as safety net support.
2011-2012	Remained 2	Riti Ching Marma takes all the pressure for run the family with their children. Monthly average income is now about 1800/- taka by which they are maintain her family. Takes 2 meals with rice seasonal vegetables. Poor quality and quantity. In a month they take 2 -3 days dry fish as protein.

