Heavily dependent on agriculture, these people are now left with little land where they can cultivate. The scraps of hilly land here and there are too little to be their main source of living.

Fishing has since then become the principal source of their earning, but scarcity has hit that area too. "Some people have started catching fish with *moshari* (mosquito net). They are emptying the lake of fish," Anandalal of Kokipara village laments. On the tiny shreds of land they cultivate rice, ginger, holud etc. They also sell bamboo and wood, which is plentiful in this hilly area. Some of them try to grow bananas or pineapples. But these activities can barely feed them let alone provide access to other basic necessities of life.

Amid the marks of impoverishment that are spread out all over Kokipara, some signs of development also come to notice. The silvery solar panels glittering in the February sun on the rooftops in Kokipara are one such sign.



In the meetings of the Para Development Committee, the community decides what development enterprises they want to undertake and how.

THINGS however have begun to change for the last one-year or so. Amid the marks of impoverishment that are spread out all over Kokipara, some signs of development also come to notice. The silvery solar panels glittering in the February sun on the rooftops in Kokipara are one such sign.

Thanks to UNDP-supported Preparatory Assistance Project (PAP) that was initiated back in 2003 to help the poorest people of the region. It's a unique programme where the communities themselves plan and implement their own projects. Each of the villages forms a "Para Development Committee (PDC)", which in consultation with the community make all the decisions about what they want to do and how to do it. Over the last two years or so some 1,000 villages or paras have had access to an average of Tk 400,000 from UNDP's "Quick Impact Fund" to finance their various development initiatives.

The solar panels in Kokipara village have been bought from this fund. The success of its PAP has encouraged UNDP to continue and go for larger scale development works in this region. Towards the end of last year United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed a project titled "Promotion of Development and Confidence Building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts" worth 50 million US dollars or approximately Tk 300 crore. The project touted as UNDP's largest ever project in Bangladesh is being supported by European Commission, Australia, Japan, Norway and USAID and is expected to benefit some 2,500 communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The solar panels that adorn most of rooftops in Kokipara were not bought by UNDP alone. In fact UNDP provided an initial grant of Tk 9,000 for each of the solar panels while the recipient has been paying a monthly installment of Tk 442 to pay off the rest. "After three years, I will become owner of the panel," Chandrasagar Chakma says. "Their contribution in the purchase will create a sense of ownership among them," Heli Uusikyla, field manager, Chittagong Hill Tracts, explains.

In their otherwise primitive lifestyle, the solar panels have brought in a touch of modernisation in the form of electric bulbs. They no more have to remain in the half darkness after the dusk descends. Electricity has proven to be financially viable too. "We had to spend more on kerosene that we now pay as the monthly instalment for the solar panel," Anandalal Chakma, the President of Kokipara PDC, shows the benefit mathematically. There are other benefits too. Children can now study under