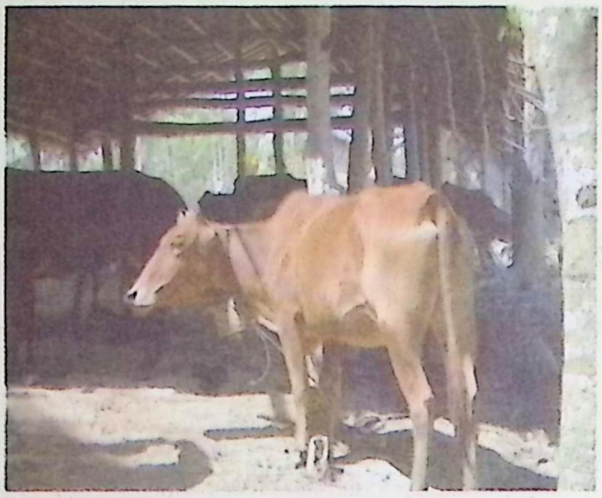
electric light. "We don't have to worry anymore about the expenses of burning oil," Neela Chakma, a woman in her mid thirties, says. "Besides we can sew clothes and Kanthas (thin blanket) at night," Neela hastens to add.



Fattening of cows is one of the many development activities the indigenous people are engaged in.

THE PDC of Kokipara has also bought an engine boat and rice grinding machine with UNDP's financial assistance. Assets like engine boat and rice mill not owned by any individual or a group of people but by the entire community and the whole community enjoys their service. Locked by water all around the engine boat has been like a blessing. Apart from going to market in Rangamati town for selling and buying, sending their children to school and other regular activities, they no more have to worry about emergency situations like taking one to a doctor.

Both the boat and rice grinding machine are owned by the community and everyone has to pay to use them. The money thus collected from boat fare and grinding machine's service is used for purchasing oil and the rest is saved in a bank account held by the community.

Chittagong Hill Tracts comprising three districts Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari district are the most deprived and disadvantageous area in the entire country. The 25-year long bitter fight over land and resource management issues left most of its 1.3 million people stranded in extreme poverty. Peace was restored in 1997 with the signing of a peace treaty, but the condition of these hilly people has improved little. More than 40 percent of the population is unemployed, three quarters live below the poverty line and 50 percent of children drop out of school sometimes during their primary education. Thankfully, the government and the international development agencies have started working here.

The UNDP-provided "Quick Impact Fund" or QIF is used in different enterprise by different paras. The 35 families of which 15 are Bangali in Marma Para have bought 20 cows with the UNDP fund. The cows will be fattened and by the time they are sold off they will give birth to some more. "We feed them khar, khail, bhushi mixed with urea fertiliser," Kio Thoi Proue, president of Marma Para PDC says. UNDP arranged training for a five members team of this para at the Upazila Livestock (Pashupalan) Office, who in turn trained others in the Para. "We have bought the cows for Tk 5,000-6,000 each and hope to sell at tk 10,000-15,000," 54-year old Abul Kalam, says. Kalam, the general secretary of PDC, who happens to be a Bangali, also points out that they have been earning out of these cows for a while: "For the last several months we get about 10-12 litres of milk which we sell at Tk 30 per litre."

Some 180 people of 29 families in Jibtoli Headman Para, which is about 45 minutes away by speedboat from Rangamati town, got involved with UNDP in December 2004. There had been a primary school in this para called Jibtoli Headman Para Primary School that closed down due to financial crisis about three years ago. Coming under UNDP programme the first thing the people of this area wanted was revival of the school which UNDP readily complied with. The (konchi) bamboo-walled four-room school may be very humble in appearance but the people of this village, most of whom never went to a school, are hopeful of a better future centring this school where their children, their next generation are learning. "Our children will one day stand on their own feet, then we will have no want," Mangal Kumar Chakma, the 42-year old President of Jibtali PDC says.

UNDP has not only raised the structure but has also been paying the three teachers' salary. The people here are cultivating fish too. Last September they left more than 25,000 fries of Katol, Mrigel, Kalibaus in the part of Kaptai Lake just in front of their village. They bought two huge nets for Tk 48,000 and fries for Tk 50,000 with UNDP grant. They have fenced a large area with the nets where they are cultivating fish. "We will be catching fish towards late April or early May," Jagatlal Chakma, a member of PDC as well as the Headmaster of Jibtali Headman Para Primary School, says.

For years the people in these hill areas have lived through conflict and unrest. The PDC President Mangal Kumar Chakma, an ex-combatant, says, "War is not good, we want peace," Chakma says. But peace without food does not work. UNDP has come forward and along with it other international donor communities to build trust and confidence among this people and if the government's sincere endeavour is added with it the day may not be far away when these people will have both peace and prosperity.