Community Empowerment Approaches

Prepared for

SHOUHARDO

CARE Bangladesh

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Acronyms

CAP	Community Action Plan
DD	Direct Delivery
ECCD	Early Child Care for Development
EKATA	Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action
HH	Household
HHN	Health Hygiene and Nutrition
IGA	Income Generating Activities
MTR	Mid-Term Review
PEP	Poor and Extreme Poor
PIC	Program Implementation Committee
PNGO	Partner NGO
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
SDC	Slum Development Committee
SHOUHARDO	Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities
SMC	School Management Committee
SO	Strategic Objective
SSN	Social Safety Net
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
VDC	Village Development Committee
VGF	Vulnerable Group Feeding
WAPDA	Water and Power Development Authority

Executive summary

1. Introduction

SHOUHARDO, USAID's largest global food security program (October 2004-May 2010) aims to 'Sustainably reduce chronic and transitory food insecurity of 400,000 households (HHs) in 18 districts of Bangladesh'. The Program builds on earlier food security initiatives and operates in four major regions of Bangladesh – Kishoreganj (Haor regions), Rangpur (North Chars), Tangail (mid-Chars) and Chittagong (Coastal areas).

The program has four specific strategic objectives:-

- SO1: Improved availability/economic access to food through strengthening livelihoods, entitlements and enhancing accountability of service providers.
- SO2: Sustainable improvement in the health and nutrition of project participants.
- SO3: Enhanced empowerment of 400,000 women and girls from targeted vulnerable HHs.
- SO4: Targeted communities and institutions are better able to prepare for, mitigate and respond to natural disasters.

It aims to create the conditions for a transformation in the traditional power structures that have marginalized and exploited the poorest segments of society by adopting the strategy of introducing local level collective institutions. The thematic study on community empowerment aims to look into the approaches and methods that SHOUHARDO has introduced for collective community empowerment.

2. Objectives and Methodology of thematic study

Specific objectives of this study are:

a) to assess how effectively the approaches are contributing to positive change, and how sustainable these changes are and;
b) provide recommendations on how the approaches can be improved for future programming, especially in relation to the 'Impact Statement' and 'Impact Groups' CARE has committed to.

Through an existing literature review and staff interviews, the consultants identified different components of SHOUHARDO to be studied within three areas of empowerment. Using CARE Bangladesh's empowerment model, to elaborate the analysis, these three areas are

- agency: participants exercising choice with available options;
- relationship: negotiating needs and rights through interdependence, cooperation with others;

- structure: changing institutions, norms and values (religious/cultural) through active inclusion.

Field visits were conducted in five SHOUHARDO communities in Kishoregonj and Rangpur regions. Following CARE's impact statement, six indicators have been developed to measure the nature, extent and potential sustainability of community empowerment approaches and methods.

3. Findings of Study

3.1 Reduced exploitation and dependency

SHOUHARDO activities have been successful in improving knowledge, capabilities and practices to reduce exploitation and dependency. However, two important issues are worth mentioning. **First,** capabilities and practice vary across sites. We have found that homogeneity of the groups (e.g. all equally poor), the presence of an imminent threat or common problem in the community and performance of PNGO and DD frontline staff significantly contribute to poor achieving agency. **Second,** the provision of direct household level input supply contributes to SHOUHARDO participants believing that they are poor and thus dependent on SHOUHARDO for their material wellbeing. Hence, a relief mentality among many participants has been evident in all sites which has in fact created another level of dependency of the PEP.

3.2 Creation of spaces

Findings regarding creation of space for the poor to participate in collective empowerment processes are mixed. Not following CAP in all sites visited is problematic. When asked about CAP, the interviewees mentioned that at the beginning of the program, a CAP was formulated. Eventually, it could not be followed because of pre-determined input supply by the PNGOs.

However, in communities with strong VDC/SDCs, SHOUHARDO participants know their expected role in collective forums. Local institutions also recognize VDC/SDC as a legitimate pro-poor forum. Nonetheless, in most instances only a few individuals emerge as leaders of these forums and at times they hinder the process of others' effective participation. The problem becomes acute where VDC/SDCs are led by non-poor. At least three of the five VDC/SDCs visited are dominated by non-poor i.e. key position holders and decision makers are non-poor. Consequently, apparently sympathetic pro-poor elites of the community may in fact become patrons for the PEP. As a result, instead of breaking the unequal power structure, they may reinforce and sustain it. In four of five sites, other than dominant non-poor VDC/SDC leaders, VDC/SDC members could not adequately answer the questions related to their collective level agency and relationships. Instead, they frequently referred to the non-poor leaders for answering such questions.

EKATA has been recorded as the most aware group that has been able to create space for women/girls in the community. EKATA uses REFLECT model in training its group members and thus the group members can internalize the issues related to their rights better. In one site, where there was no EKATA, the level of knowledge and practices in

realizing rights has been found less satisfactory compared to other four sites. (For details please refer to the women's empowerment report).

SHOUHARDO supplies inputs to both the community and household levels. Household level inputs vary in their types and material value which at times create animosity among SHOUHARDO participants, affecting the success of the collective group and the process of creating space for all participants.

3.3 Increased access to services and responsiveness of duty bearers

Across the sites, SHOUHARDO participants know about available social safety net services. They also understand that discussing the availability and quality of these services through collective negotiations may result in better access. Participants perceive that because of their collective forum, the corruption of UP and government officials are less evident in their community than that of neighbouring non-SHOUHARDO villages. The government institutions frequently listen to the collective voice and co-opt VDC members in decision making. However, we have also found that the duty bearer institutions do not have the capacity to respond adequately. For example, in providing health care services, there is a lack of resources including doctors. These supply side problems hinder the realization of access to services as well as responsiveness of the duty bearers.

3.4 Better adaptation/coping strategies in addressing challenges

We have found evidence that SHOUHARDO participants' responses to challenges have improved in last three years. They utilize innovative approaches when they face obstacles in their lives in terms of livelihood options and other social benefits (e.g. new IGAs, access to health and education). They know the institutions and persons who are able to provide inputs/services. SHOUHARDO staff and VDC/SDCs should identify traditional community level good practices and adaptive models and reintroduce and reinforce them within SHOUHARDO. In all five sites such initiatives were not adequately reported. Emphasis should be given on integrations of indigenous practices and modern technologies. It will help non-SHOUHARDO community members to be more willing to accept/accommodate SHOUHARDO interventions.

3.5 Positive pro-poor change in local power structure

SHOUHARDO members demonstrate that they know that unequal power structures exist. However, in most instances, the poor perceive this unequal power structure as a given phenomenon. Thus, when the poor approach local elites, the implicit hierarchical aspect of their relationship does not decline. In addition, in sites where the SDC/VDC leaders are in a better economic and social position than that of most SHOUHARDO participants, the pace of positive pro-poor change has been slower.

3.6 Sustainability

From the above findings it is clear that SHOUHARDO interventions surrounding community empowerment have brought positive changes in PEP's life. SHOUHARDO participants have better knowledge about existing services and livelihood options, rights

of women, needs of pregnant and lactating mothers and other related life skills issues. Also, the mobility of women has significantly increased. Women now frequently negotiate with powerful segment of the society (e.g. UP/PS, government officials, market). Concrete examples of group level sustainability have also been recorded. Many IGA groups have adopted innovative ways to ensure their sustainability (e.g. weekly/monthly savings, leases of land and ponds beyond the SHOUHARDO period). They are able to determine their future course of action to achieve what they envision for themselves. Thus, there will be a certain level of sustainability around the agency level empowerment.

We have found that once the poor get involved in SHOUHARDO, they are able to identify the possible ways to mobilize resources within their own community. There is much evidence that following the SHOUHARDO program, the community (both SHOUHARDO and non-SHOUHARDO) have tried to utilize resources from other projects (e.g. ADP block grant, 100 days EGP etc) for their own community development by negotiating with the UP/PS and other government officials.

Also, there is clear evidence that, where the existing VDC/SDC/IGA/occupational group members have participated in earlier rights based initiatives (e.g. animators training by the Hunger Project, Concern WW group participation, RDRS group participation etc), they have emerged as the natural leaders for SHOUHARDO. Hence, it is highly likely that the SHOUHARDO group members will carry their skills and empowerment beyond the life of the program. Given the fact that SHOUHARDO had a delayed start, the implementing agencies did not get enough time to concentrate on empowerment and rights issues. Thus this level of achievement is indeed praiseworthy.

However, there is lack of sharing information and working together among different community groups (VDC/SDC, EKATA, IGA and Savings groups, HHN etc). Frequent interaction, integration and coordination of activities among groups may strengthen and accelerate the process of community interaction. Many forum members also expressed the need of such collective initiative.

3.7. Number and Quality of PNGOS

SHOUHARDO implementation mainly depends on PNGOs. Hence, it is of utmost urgency that these frontline PNGOs themselves believe in the SHOUHARDO message and philosophy. It is difficult for the CARE staff to ensure that all the PNGOs are working with same standard and rigour, given the number, size and administrative quality of the PNGOs. At present there are 44 PNGOs.

It has also been observed during the field visits that field staff and community volunteers did not receive adequate training themselves to communicate abstract ideas of 'empowerment' and to facilitate ways that PEP can apply these concepts to become more powerful. Regional staff may provide additional training and direct support to field staff and community volunteers to determine the best ways to communicate and carry out ideas related to empowerment at the community level.

4. Recommendations

The social change processes, supported by SHOUHARDO, require time to realize. This huge task is not likely to be achieved in a five-year span. Thus, we **first** recommend that similar programs with the same target population should be continued for at least another five-year term. Keeping this core recommendation at the centre, this thematic study provides the following recommendations for future programming.

- ***Community Action Plan (CAP)*** which is not being implemented largely, should be reinforced. The material input supply should be flexible enough to meet the demands of the CAP.

- ***Composition of VDC/SDC and other SHOUHARDO groups*** should strictly follow only including PEP. Because of the possibility of non-poor dominating collective forums (as has been observed in four of five sites), these forums should exclude non-poor members as active group members. Instead, they can act as advisors or honorary members (without any decision making power).

- ***EKATA should be introduced in all sites*** as it has been recorded as the most visible component of women's empowerment. EKATA trainings following the REFLECT model seem to work very well when it comes to realizing rights. Hence, EKATA should be integrated across all sites, not a selected few.

- ***The activities of all community based groups*** (savings groups, IGA groups, the EKATA groups, the HHN groups, and the VDC/SDC) should be integrated and coordinated as they all represent the same mission of change. One bi-monthly general meeting for all forums may be piloted in the next program design.

- ***Indigenous good practices/adaptive models should be integrated*** with new technologies (introduced by SHOUHARDO). It will enhance adaptation of SHOUHARDO intervention by larger community. As a result, a wider level of community empowerment will take place.

- ***Material inputs supply*** should be limited only to the ***community level*** instead of household level to bring collective well-being for the whole community and avoid animosities among SHOUHARDO participants and between participants and larger community.
- ***IGA input support at the household level*** should limit to training and providing with a "no-interest" loan with a grace period of at least 6 months. VDC/SDC should be trained to manage and operate this "no-interest" loan. This activity will help VDC/SDC to sustain beyond the project life and the fund will remain within the community and will revolve to help other PEP households.

- In the absence of household level material input supply, along with no-interest loan, ***matching grants*** may be allocated ***for different savings groups*** initiated by the program to help them sustain (For details, CARE-FoSHoL groups' matching grant system may be referred).

- For the next phase of SHOUHARDO or similar programs, ***the number of PNGOs should be reduced*** significantly in order to ensure the smooth

implementation of the software components of the program and maintain the same standard and rigour.

- ***Frontline staff and SHOUHARDO volunteers*** should be transformed into ***"Social Change Agents"*** by provisioning extensive training for them. CARE regional staff should provide additional training and direct support to field staff and community volunteers.

- Finally, **SHOUHARDO** ***should build on previous rights-based NGO interventions*** as it has been observed that participants in earlier programs have emerged as natural leaders in SHOUHARDO.

6. Prioritizing SHOUHARDO interventions in community empowerment

Based on our field level findings, at least three interventions stand out to be most effective and should hence be continued. These are VDC/SDC, EKATA and IGA based groups. On the other hand, linkage with UP through memberships of SHOUHARDO participants in standing committees, inclusion in SMC/PTA have not been very productive and may be discontinued. Other SO specific group like HHN group, mothers' group, PIC may be continued based on the need of SOs.

7. Conclusion

We conclude that SHOUHARDO interventions have been successful in transforming the targeted PEP's life and social realities to a great extent. In general, the right based approach of SHOUHARDO has worked well as the participants are aware about their rights, better informed regarding the ways of realizing them and also have set several successful examples in attaining them. But, although these findings can be attributed to the community as a whole, the progress in the understanding and the network of the marginalized is still not fully satisfactory. There are instances where the poor tend to see these issues from the angle of needs rather than rights. Based on our study, we recommend that the lessons learned from the implementation of the rights-based approach of SHOUHARDO should be fully utilized for further program interventions in future. Discontinuation of a program like SHOUHARDO just after one project cycle will not be desirable from a rights-based development perspective.

1. **Introduction**

The SHOUHARDO Program run by CARE, USAID's largest global food security program began operating from October 2004 and will continue until May 2010. The overall goal of the Program is to 'Sustainably reduce chronic and transitory food insecurity of 400,000 households (HHs) in 18 districts of Bangladesh'. The Program specifically targets the poorest and most disenfranchised populations of Bangladesh.

According to the mid term review and other related documents of the program, SHOUHARDO builds on earlier food security initiatives and operates in four major regions of Bangladesh – Kishoreganj (Haor regions), Rangpur (North Chars), Tangail (mid-Chars) and Chittagong (Coastal areas). Ninety-five percent of the implementation is through 44 local partner NGOs, the remaining 5 percent through direct delivery. Each of these four regions possess their own unique topography, but are consistent in that the beneficiaries within are some of the most marginalised groups in Bangladesh due to their remoteness. The program currently operates in 18 districts, 493 Unions, 16 Pourashavas and one city corporation of Bangladesh in both rural and urban settings. 2,205 villages and 137 urban slums, reaching over 407,000 households and two million individuals are SHOUHARDO participants.

SHOUHARDO program has four specific strategic objectives. These include:--

- SO1: Improved availability/economic access to food through strengthening livelihoods, entitlements and enhancing accountability of service providers.
- SO2: Sustainable improvement in the health and nutrition of project participants.
- SO3: Enhanced empowerment of 400,000 women and girls from targeted vulnerable HHs.
- SO4: Targeted communities and institutions are better able to prepare for, mitigate and respond to natural disasters.

In course of time, SHOUHARDO aims to create the conditions for a transformation in the traditional power structures that have marginalized and exploited the poorest segments of society. Related to this program goal, SHOUHARDO's principal strategy of program implementation has introduced local level collective institutions and provide effective representation for the poor and extreme poor of the local society. These institutions, called Village Development Committees (VDCs) in rural areas and Slum Development Committees (SDCs) in urban areas, are meant to be comprised of representatives of the poor and extreme poor (PEP), authorized and legitimized by the local community and commissioned as leaders to develop and operationalize a community-driven development plan. The thematic study on community empowerment aims to look into the approaches and methods that SHOUHARDO has introduced through these mechanisms for collective community empowerment. It is clear from available SHOUHARDO documents that community empowerment cuts across all the four SOs mentioned above. Thus, this study concentrated on available SHOUHARDO activities across all SOs that relate to rights-based empowerment of the PEP.

2. Objectives of thematic study

According to the ToR, the 'thematic study' on community empowerment has concentrated on the 'approaches' and 'systems' introduced by the SHOUHARDO to achieve its' goal of community empowerment. The specific objectives of this study are:

a) To assess how effectively the approaches are contributing to positive change, and how sustainable these changes are and
b) Provide recommendations on how the approaches can be improved for future programming, especially in relation to the 'Impact Statement' and 'Impact Groups' CARE has committed to.

Assessing the effectiveness and sustainability of community empowerment approaches and systems in contrasting sites are complicated. These issues are complex and intricately related with the labyrinth of social, political and cultural relations, networks and structures of those communities in question. The premise of these kinds of empowerment assessments involves the estimation of the degree of self-determination both in the individual and community levels, and also in terms of processes and outcomes. That is, these empowerment approaches and systems can be judged through the process of increasing and enhancing the knowledge and attitudes, capabilities and participation and practices of the participants. Also as these processes take place both in individual, community and organizational level, their effectiveness and sustainability should also be considered in the levels of agency, relationship and structure.

On the other hand, these empowerment approaches and systems can be considered in terms of outcomes. Contemplating these against the background of the impact missions of CARE (which emphasized on the empowerment of most socially, economically and politically marginalized women; helping the oppressed groups to move beyond their constraining life conditions; and also helping those economically marginalized groups to have more secure and viable livelihood strategies), the effectiveness and sustainability may be assessed through **six** indicators, including: reduced exploitation and dependency at the community level; creation of spaces; increased access to services; better adaptation/coping strategies in addressing challenges, and positive pro-poor change in local power structure (drawn from CARE impact statements). Thus, in this research effort, the approaches and processes were assessed by looking at both the processes and outcomes at the individual, community and organizational levels.

3. Process of how thematic study was conducted

The thematic study started with reviewing secondary materials and documents received from CBHQ. CBHQ level consultation meetings and individual interviews were conducted for the purpose of designing the study. Through a review of existing literature and staff interviews, the consultants identified the following components of SHOUHARDO to be studied to understand the depth of community empowerment:

- VDC/SDC

- EKATA
- IGA based SHOUHARDO groups
- Occupational groups
- Savings groups
- Mothers Group
- Court yard meetings and
- SHOUHARDO members' participation in local level representative bodies (UP standing committees, SMC, PTA, PS, PIC, Market Committees etc)

However, we decided to refrain from studying EKATA extensively for this thematic study as another separate thematic study on women's empowerment was being conducted in parallel. After the initial staff interviews, the research framework and tools were designed and were presented to the CBHQ staff members for their comments and feedback. Six indicators (as mentioned in the previous section) were developed following the SHOUHARDO and broader CARE mission and impact statements. Also three areas of empowerment were identified, using CARE Bangladesh' empowerment model, to elaborate the analysis. These three areas are:

AGENCY: SHOUHARDO participants exercising choice with available options.

RELATIONSHIPS: SHOUHARDO participants negotiating of needs and rights through interdependence, cooperation with others.

STRUCTURE: SHOUHARDO participants changing institutions (markets, education system, committees, government), norms (socialized), values (religious/cultural) through active inclusion. (Please see Annex A for the detailed study framework)

Once the study design and tools were finalized, the consultants engaged in extensive field level data collection. The field visits were conducted in five SHOUHARDO communities in Kishoregonj and Rangpur regions. The study sites are

1. Gachtola Ghat Slum, Bhairab
2. Boroshakoa village, Nabigonj, Hobigonj
3. Murikandi village, Niamotpur Kishoregonj
4. Char Varatgopaljhara village, Jaldhaka, Nilphamari
5. Purba Chatnai village, Dimla, Nilphamari

The following procedures were undertaken in each of the five study sites: the consultants first met the SHOUHARDO participants and other villagers in a community consultation meeting. After the initial community level consultations, FGDs and key informant interviews with SHOUHARDO participants as well as VDC/SDC position-holders were conducted. After these initial rounds of interviews and FGDs, in-depth case studies involving different aspects of community empowerment were documented following a case mapping method. The purpose of this research component was to understand the level, nature and extent of empowerment at the community and household levels in a detailed and in–depth manner. During the community consultation,

initial key informant interviews and FGDs, information about "much-talked-about" examples of empowerment/collective action were collected. Using the snowball method, individuals affected by and/or involved in a specific case were identified and interviewed to understand the patterns, dynamics, effect and impact of such empowerment/collective action process. Moreover, local elected representatives and Upazilla level officials were interviewed. In total, 204 people were interviewed/consulted during the study. At the end of field visits in each region, a regional level consultation with relevant CARE-SHOUHARDO staff was conducted to validate the preliminary findings.

However, it is important to mention that the study could cover only five sites and we could spent only two to three days in each site. Thus, the findings of this study do not evaluate the performance of SHOUHARDO in areas of community empowerment. Instead, the study tried to understand the approaches and methods used by the program in areas of community empowerment. More specifically, we tried to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches and methods and the possibility of their future replication. We have also tried to prioritize the components that are more important than others for future program consideration.

4. Findings of the Study

As mentioned earlier, the study concentrated on six indicators to understand the issues surrounding community empowerment. Following are major findings according to those indicators.

4.1 Reduced exploitation and dependency

SHOUHARDO envisions that people in the lowest category of wellbeing ranking especially those trapped in a set of unequal power relation, overcome the barriers that prevent the fulfilment of their rights. To attain this vision, one of the paths of change that CARE follows is to reduce the exploitation of the marginal and oppressed groups and their dependency on others. This head-on approach is a testimony of CARE's empowerment perspective that it is not a material or service which can be transferred and delivered overnight. Instead, it is a painstaking process that needs the commitment to challenge the unequal power structure, age-old cultural norms, and social injustices. According to our study the state of the situation is as follows:

4.1.1. Agency

In general the participants of SHOUHARDO are aware of their rights and pursue a collective path to attain them. Most striking example includes the right to *khas* lands. In three of the five fields visited, activities regarding *khas* land were recorded. In Boroshakoa, for example, the president of VDC along with other members has been trying to lease 15 acres *khas* land. Biswajit Das, the secretary of VDC said –

"most of our fields stay submerged for seven months in a year. On the other hand, khas lands by the fish farm remain unexploited. The elites are using the land for their own purposes while we (PEP) can't use the land. But our right to that land is equally valid".

As a result of workshops and discussions supported by SHOUHARDO, people in Gachtolaghat are now aware of their right to *khas* land. For example, Rufia, a SHOUHARDO participant, came to know that those who have less than ten decimals of land can apply for *khas* lands. Then she contacted her neighbour Barek Mia, a land broker. Barek Mia told her about a piece of land (500 acre) in front of an adjacent UP building, and suggested that she apply for this land together with him and other participants of SHOUHARDO. Rufia, together with Barek, Taslima and Shahana went to the land office and applied for ownership of the land. During the interview, they were found to be waiting for the decision of Upazilla level *Khas* land distribution committee to know the fate of their application.

There are numerous examples of collective actions in Char Varatgopaljhara. The bamboo bridge over the Tista canal is such an example. The community needed a bridge, as they had to walk through the shallow canal to reach the other side which was not only troublesome for everybody, but also posed a security risk to women at night. Last year, the VDC president along with other members discussed the issue with the larger society and local UP member in a meeting. They agreed to raise necessary resources and build the bridge themselves. The UP member contributed substantially. The villagers contributed by providing bamboo, rope and free labour. VDC was in charge of organizing and overseeing the project.

Another example in Char Varatgopaljhara is the reconstructing the road from Shoilmari to Beribadh. SHOUHARDO participants took the initiative to construct the road. They approached the UP member who agreed to incorporate the project to the list of works in the 100-days (government) employment generation program.

In Purbachatnai, an example of collective action has been resisting the WAPDA eviction. Many PEP who lost their land in the Tista river erosion were living illegally on the WAPDA embankment. When the eviction was to take place, the PEP collectively and spontaneously protested against their displacement from the government land. The VDC secretary discussed the issue with the UP chairman and members, and a school teacher, who is also a victim of river erosion. They organized a mass signature campaign to be submitted to the Upazila administration. Eventually, the authority promised to rehabilitate the affected people and then construct the road.

In the same community, PEP negotiated to raise the wages of the construction workers working in the embankment of the Tista River. Fifteen men and fifteen women were hired to lay concrete and construct blocks in exchange of a sixty-taka daily wage for male workers and forty taka for female workers. But after working two days the workers, who were also SHOUHARDO participants, became dissatisfied with the wage and stopped working. They went to the VDC secretary for a solution. The VDC secretary negotiated with the contractor who agreed to pay the workers according to the piece of work, rather than by the hour or day. This action raised their wage almost by 50 percent.

In Gachtolaghat, the SHOUHARDO participants organized several successful collective actions. An example is the reconstructing the footpath in front of ECCD school of SHOUHARDO. About a month ago, the path was constructed over the sewage drain by a local contractor which was funded by the municipality corporation. Just after ten days,

parts of the drain and footpath slabs broke down. The SDC members went to the ward councillor and complained about it. The councillor along with the SDC members went to the mayor of the municipality. The mayor called on the contractor and ordered him to reconstruct the footpath and the drain.

Another example for this site is the construction of a dustbin. In this locality there were no dustbins. SDC took the initiative to construct one and contacted with influential landlords and businessmen of the community. They suggested discussing the issue with the municipality. Together they went to the mayor who advised them to manage a piece of land and promised to construct a dustbin there. One of the landlords agreed to provide a piece of land and others collectively paid him. Then the municipality constructed a dustbin.

In Boroshakoa, SHOUHARDO participants constructed a road in front of the VDC office. VDC led the process of collecting funds from various sources such as the UP, SHOUHARDO, and from the villagers living at home and abroad.

In contrast to these areas, members of VDC in Murikandi are poorer and spend most of their efforts to fulfil their basic needs. Not surprisingly, they did not demonstrate much concern for their rights. Even, in cases where they knew about their rights, they were not keen to advocate for those rights. For example, Sufia, a VDC member, has a teenage son who became disabled after suffering from polio. When she went to the UP member of her ward for a card providing an allowance for the disabled, the UP member demanded a bribe of three thousand taka. She did not inform VDC about the incident for fear of retribution from the UP member. In spite of her knowledge and awareness of her rights, instead of claiming her rights with the help of VDC, she chose to bribe the member. When probed, she stated that she did not think that VDC could help her in this matter as it was her individual problem. She was also afraid that if VDC discusses the issue with the UP member, she might refuse that she asked for bribe. Instead, she may accuse Sufia for ill-mouthing. That would worsen Sufia's chance to receive the benefit. The only incident of collective action recorded in Murikandi has been the community-wide sanitation.

Another important issue is worth mentioning in terms agency. The provision of direct household level input supply makes SHOUHARDO participants believe that they are poor and thus dependent on SHOUHARDO for their material wellbeing. Many interviewees repeatedly expressed that they should have received more material inputs from SHOUHARDO or from the government. Also, in all sites many participants complained that there are discriminations in distributing material benefits. While some households received cows or goats others received vegetable or maize seeds. Thus, a relief mentality among many participants has been evident in all sites. The provision of receiving material input from SHOUHARDO may in fact contribute to creating another level of dependency of the PEP.

4.1.2 Relationship

To obtain their rights, the poor and extreme poor usually do not contact with anyone outside their close relatives and friends. This changed once SHOUHARDO began. They now contact members and leaders of SHOUHARDO vehicles of change such as

SDC/VDC, EKATA as well as the local leaders and officials such as the UP chairman and members, UNO, the municipality mayor and ward councillor for these purposes. The level of dynamism of both the leaders and the groups as a whole contributes to people's engagement with them. There is evidence that involvement of active and well-networked VDC leaders enhances community empowerment. As was seen in the collective-action cases, people had more contact with the VDC president and the secretary in Boroshakoa, Char Varatgopaljhara and Purbachatnai.

The relationship between the social actors in the larger community and the poor has been strong in Boroshakoa. As was the case in Char Varatgopaljhara and Purbachatnai, the credit largely goes to SHOUHARDO's effective leadership, since they succeeded in bringing them together. Manik lal Das who was UP secretary for thirty years and is the VDC president remains the key person in enabling poor people's capabilities for collective action. The idea of getting a lease of *khas* land came from him. But the flip side of this single handed leadership tactic is the absolute control of Manik Lal over VDC.

On the other hand, in Murikandi, VDC lacks effective leadership and consequently VDC and SHOUHARDO participants in general are not in good terms with the larger society. The president of VDC is a private tutor. The secretary is a petty businessman. The social networks of both of them are very weak. As a result, the poor here do not go to them to attain their rights, rather they go to the local leaders like the UP chairman and members. In contrast to other areas, VDC does not have a working relationship with the UP. Subsequently, the UP is not properly equipped to meet the demands of the poor.

Gachtolaghat can be ranked in between the two extremes. To claim their rights, the people that the poor contact are the mayor of the municipality and ward councillor as well as government officials such as UNO. In addition, the poor - especially women - go to the SDC president to claim their rights. The SDC has a strong working relationship with the local administration and with other social actors in the locality. However, as the members of SDC are predominantly women and from the landlord strata, collective action initiatives generally tend to conform to their personal interest (e.g women's issues or landlord's issues). Consequently, because they exclude men, they lack legitimacy in the eyes of the larger community.

4.1.3 Structure

In terms of structure, SHOUHARDO participants demonstrated significant advancement. This advancement is largely the outcome of improvements observed in the "agency" and "relationship" domains. That is, their newly gained ideas, knowledge and resources helped them to bring changes in the structures that affect them. These changes were especially evident in the local institutions which became more responsive and accountable. Usually, the institutions that are involved in helping the poor to realize their rights are Upazila administration, land office, UP, hospital and school.

In Char Varatgopaljahara, VDC demanded tube wells for drinking water from UP and eventually UP provided 25 tube wells from its' government allocated Annual

Development Program block grant. Also, in the case of the road from Shoilmari to Beribadh, UP selected the beneficiaries of the 100 day EGP from the participants of SHOUHARDO. They worked in collaboration with SHOUHARDO in this project. Half of the road was built by UP and the other half by SHOUHARDO.

But on the other hand, in Murikandi. collective action leading to rights is mostly missing. Consequently, SHOUHARDO participants did not go to UP or government officials to attain their rights collectively.

Lastly, across all sites, socio–structural changes - especially in relation to violence against women, - are still modest. This is especially evident in Gachtolaghat. Despite the influence of an urban setting, little advancement was seen in terms of empowerment of poor women at the community level. One example is Sajid Mia, a SDC volunteer, who did not receive any dowry during his marriage. But when he was searching someone for his sisters who would not take dowry, he could not find any suitors. Similarly, Taslima, who despite being a SDC volunteer had to bring four lakh taka from her parents for her husband's expenses during his migration abroad. Also, Nurjahan, the SDC president, was evicted from her home a few days before she was interviewed. Nurjahan's husband bought their land from Jalal Uddin twenty five years ago. Fifteen years ago, Kala Mia, an influential landlord in that area, claimed ownership of that land and filed a case against them. The verdict of the case concluded that Kala Mia was owner resulting in Nurjahan's eviction in February. Nurjahan expressed that because she is a woman and does not know courts and laws very well, she was defeated in fighting her case.

4.2. Creation of spaces

Another path of change that CARE adopts in helping the poor to overcome the barriers that prevent the fulfilment of their rights is to create spaces for them in the local governance and development process. In each community, "SHOUHARDO staff worked with the local participants through a series of participatory exercises. These included developing: a community social map as part of the well-being analysis, a prioritized problem list, a problem analysis (usually, a problem tree), followed by a community action plan (CAP)" (SHOUHARDO Mid-term review Report, 2007). During our field visits, all VDC/SDCs mentioned that a CAP has been formulated at the beginning of the program. It could not be followed later on because of pre-determined input supply by the PNGOs. Moreover, the CAP was not seen in any SHOUHARDO premise (e.g. VDC office or ECCD school). Instead of following the CAP, it appeared that VDC/SDC and SHOUHARDO participants are working following the schedule of material input supply by PNGOs. However, despite the absence of CAP, SHOUHARDO groups played a key role in amplifying the voices of the poor in the community.

4.2.1 Agency

The extent to which SHOUHARDO groups are successful in creating spaces in local governance and development processes for the poor depends on a four key factors.

These include: 1) the capability and commitment of the leaders and the members; 2) the composition of the group in terms of economic and social standing; 3) its relation with the larger society; and 4) the strength of its connections with the local institutions. For example, in Char Varatgopaljhara and Purbachatnai, VDCs are relatively homogenous and they have effective leadership. SHOUHARDO participants in these communities are also aware of the connections, channels and platforms which are of use to them.

In Char Varatgopaljhara, VDC successfully initiated several collective action projects which indicate the strength of relationships among themselves, local administration and with the larger society. Moreover, they effectively instigated a number of income generating projects like fish cultivation, social forestry and vegetable cultivation. Most importantly, VDC has opened an account to save their profits as a common fund which is a sign of their sustainability.

But as was discussed earlier, most VDC members in Murikandi are poor. They have little interest in matters that do not deliver immediate material benefit to them. That is, they are more concerned with the distribution of material inputs than achieving their rights, such as right to *khas* land or SSN benefits. For most VDC members, the necessity of being a member of VDC has significance in so far as it has monetary value attached to it. Sufia, a member of VDC said,

"If I weren't a member of VDC, I wouldn't have the job of measuring nutrition input distribution. I wouldn't get even one hundred taka, which is very important for my family".

In Gachtolaghat, CARE's approach in building SDC created some limitations in the scope of SDC's work. When the SHOUHARDO program started they looked for community members who are influential and well known in the community which turned out to be landlords. Consequently, SDC activities were limited to matters related only to the landlords. For example, most of the sewing trainees are the landlords' daughters. Not surprisingly, SHOUHARDO participants resent the high level of SDC incompetence and nepotism which they see takes place through the support of SHOUHARDO staff.

The creation of space in Boroshakoa can be described as satisfactory. Although the membership of VDC is divided between PEP and non-poor, they are committed and active. Most of the members are clear about their roles in VDC and do articulate the necessity of being a part of the collective forum. For example, when Gita's father-in-law commented that she shouldn't work for other's well being in the expense of her and her family's improvement, she persuaded him by saying, *"working in VDC is important as it is our collective development".* Also they participate in the regular events like weekly meetings, relief distribution and discussions.

Across all five sites, respondents reported differently about the competence of the SHOUHARDO frontline staff that in turn affected the creation of space for the poor. Where the community facilitators and volunteers were more active, capable and committed (e.g. Purbachatnai), community level collective actions were more evident than those where community facilitators were less active and competent (e.g. Murikandi).

4.2.2 Relationship

The relationships among the poor and between the poor and the larger society determine the extent of success in creating spaces in the local governance and development process for the poor. The quality and effectiveness of such relationships depend on the extent to which the social network of the leaders exists and their ability to draw people together from the society under a common platform. For example, as was evident from the cases of the road from Shoilmari to Beribadh and the bridge over the canal of Tista in Char Varatgopaljhara the relationship with the local ward member, the larger society and VDC and SHOUHARDO participants are very strong. Also, in Boroshakoa, VDC has good relationship with other social actors and the people from the larger society. Members of Boroshakoa VDC have good relationships with the Upazila administration, UP, hospitals, NGOs and other powerful actors, especially the political personalities.

In Purbachatnai, however, the picture is slightly different. In spite of having an active leadership, the relationship between the larger society and SHOUHARDO participants are affected by other political and local issues. The very active VDC secretary is a member of a specific political party and this challenged VDC's role as a neutral entity. The neutral role of the VDC without political bias is thus critical.

Examples of rifts between SHOUHARDO participants and the community have also been observed in Purbachatnai. Most villagers collect and sell stones from the river. In this business, there are two types of buyers – private buyers who usually buy quality stones at higher prices and government buyers who usually buy cheap low category stones. As selling stones to private buyers are more profitable, people usually prefer to sell stones to them. Here, SHOUHARDO participants maintain a privileged position as they maintain a network among themselves. They do not allow others to access to these buyers. Consequently, divisions in the community result in a lack of trust between SHOUHARDO participants and the larger society.

Like Purbachatnai, VDC in Murikandi and SDC in Gachtolaghat have a weak relationship with the rest of the society. In Gachtolaghat, SDC members are mostly women who engage predominantly with the problems of violence against women. Also in Murikandi, most of the VDC members are young, limiting the breadth of their social network. The economically powerful people are old and therefore uncooperative. The older leadership of Murikandi reported that they do not like the new VDC leadership. Shamsuddin, an elderly land-based elite said,

"now the days have changed. Now the youth are always conspiring against each other. I listened to what my father told me, but that is not the case with my son".

There was an incident where an altercation between the youth of Murikandi and the adjacent village took place. The Murikandi elders expressed disfavour about the way the youth handled the incident.

4.2.3 Structure

In Charvaratgopaljhara, the local institutions do accommodate VDC activities in their administrative processes as was seen in the case of road and safety nets. The upazila parishad also accepts VDC as a pro-poor forum.

In Boroshakoa, UP and the community hospital both recognize VDC as a legitimate pro-poor organization. UP donated a tube-well for the hospital and brought an electricity line. UP also includes the members of VDC in the safety net distribution committee.

In Purbachatnai, the situation is different. In spite of the participation of VDC leaders in some phases of local administration and development process, clientelism and political influence of the VDC leaders marred the progress made by them. In Purbachatni we observed relatively powerful and rich "patrons" promising to provide relatively powerless and poor "clients" with jobs, protection, infrastructure, and other benefits in exchange for votes and other forms of loyalty including labour. These relationships proved to be exploitative, often resulting in the perpetual indebtedness of the clients. As a result, the local institutions like UP are not that accountable. For example, Rabeya, a SHOUHARDO participant stated that she is the lone member of her household and is very poor. When she asked the local member for a VGF card, the member wanted 1200 taka from her. As she could not provide him with money, she did not get the card. Although the UP member is in good terms with VDC, and solicits their opinions when selecting social–safety-net beneficiaries, allegedly the selected beneficiaries used bribes to get their cards.

4.3 Increased access to services/ responsiveness of the duty bearers

To enable the poor to realize their rights SHOUHARDO focused on access to services by making the duty bearers more responsive to the poor. CARE focused on the demand side in this regard.

4.3.1 Agency

From the field visits, it was noticeable that in all sites except Murikandi, SHOUHARDO participants were aware of their rights in terms of services like social safety nets and the duties and roles of different local institutions and their officials. In most cases, their awareness was enhanced as a result of SHOUHARDO's weekly meetings and workshops. But this enrichment of awareness and capabilities are uneven through the SHOUHARDO program.

For example, SHOUHARDO participants are now more aware about their rights in regard to the services from the local institutions such as the hospital and the municipality. In Gachtolaghat, Sahera provides such an example. Sahera came to know about free medication from the community facilitator. She had tried different kinds of treatments for her nephew who was suffering from TB for two years. Then with the help of the facilitator, she went to the Bhairab municipality hospital with her nephew for treatment. When she asked an attendant about the free treatment, the attendant disrespectfully demanded that she leave. Such offensive behaviour did not keep Sahera from claiming her right to services. Rather, she argued to be seen by the doctor. After hearing her

complaint the doctor slapped the attendant and since then her nephew has been receiving free treatment.

On the other hand, in Murikandi, SHOUHARDO participants usually do not engage with local institutions. Although, participants know about services from weekly meetings, they prefer bribing the officials to get those services. And when they cannot bribe the officials they opt to stay silent for fear of repercussion from the officials. For example, Sufia received a card for her disabled son by bribing to the local UP member. But she could not manage to get a card for her widowed daughter as she failed to provide further bribe. She did not discuss either of these issues in VDC meeting since she felt it would jeopardize her relationship with the village elite.

In general, only VDC/SDC and EKATA members are clear about their rights and the roles and responsibilities of the duty bearers since they are the sole participants in the meetings and discussions. But general SHOUHARDO participants and the poor of the larger society lack knowledge and capabilities in these areas as they do not participate in the meetings and workshops. Although this development indicates the success of community based organizations like VDC or EKATA in increasing the knowledge and capability level of their members, it also signifies the need for a better mobilization and dissemination strategy for SHOUHARDO participants and other poor members of the community.

4.3.2 Relationship

It is vital for the SHOUHARDO participants to negotiate with the larger community especially the elites and the poor to work together. This endeavour has been largely absent in Char Varatgopaljhara, Murikandi and Purbachatnai in one way or other, albeit for different reasons. In Char Varatgopaljhara, the community is small and largely homogeneous and almost all households are SHOUHARDO participants. Moreover, as the service providers are relatively sincere and accountable, there has been no acute need for collective action to make duty bearers more responsive.

In Purbachatnai, VDC is generally included in the selection process of the beneficiaries for social safety net services. However, SHOUHARDO participants do not negotiate with the community elites to work together, as they are at odds over various political and local issues. In Murikandi, there is no example of collective action and negotiation where SHOUHARDO participants and community elites and poor worked together in accessing service or making duty bearers more responsive.

4.3.3 Structure

To make service delivery mechanisms more accountable to the poor, SHOUHARDO worked towards stimulating demands to services. This requires united efforts of aware and capable participants who can hold the duty bearers liable for responsibilities. It also requires negotiation and participation of communities in the administrative procedures to make service delivery processes more accountable and responsive to the poor.

SHOUHARDO participants can be accredited with success as in four of five sites they held several duty bearers responsible for their action, and through that the local institutions became more accountable. For example, in Purbachatnai, the SHOUHARDO participants compelled the teacher of a primary school to carry out his duties properly. Nur Alam, who was a teacher of the local primary school appointed another proxy teacher to carry out his duties, and paid her 500 taka from his total salary of 1500 taka. The VDC members challenged the teacher in a community meeting. Nur Alam apologized and has been carrying out his duties properly since then. Also, as was seen in the WAPDA eviction case, SHOUHARDO participants negotiated successfully with the WAPDA authority to stop the eviction.

In Boroshakoa, VDC members negotiated successfully with UP and upazila administration to run the community hospital efficiently. Also, the health assistant did not carry out her duties and behaved disrespectfully. VDC discussed the issue with her and demanded that she attend to her duties every day. As a result of their efforts, health assistant now stays inside the hospital premises during her work hours. According to villagers, she is more conscious about her responsibilities and is more receptive. The hospital now also has a citizen charter displayed inside the building.

In Gachtolaghat, as the case of the drain shows, SHOUHARDO participants were able to hold the contractor of the drain responsible for faulty construction. In terms of structural changes within access to services, Murikandi falls short of success.

On the other hand, although the institutions do recognize VDC/SDC as a legal pro poor forum, and acknowledge their demands as legitimate and necessary, but to be responsive to these community–led demands also entails that the institutions have adequate resources, training, and manpower to be responsive. As was evident from the cases of the road and social safety nets, the duty bearer institutions do acknowledge the need of the poor. But there are too many obstacles for them to follow through with their responsibilities. Thus, the supply side also needs some intervention for the duty bearers to be adequately responsive.

4.4 Better adaptation/coping strategies in addressing challenges

As per the empowerment framework of CARE, empowerment of the poor means becoming the change agents of their own development. This involves enabling the poor to be self-reliant by increasing their access to alternative livelihoods, income strategies, material assets, mobility options and participation in markets. To this end, SHOUHARDO engaged in intensive training and counselling on life skills, facilitation in creating connections with the market and the role of collective action in these coping strategies.

4.4.1 Agency

In Char Varatgopaljhara, the knowledge of the participants about the alternative livelihood options increased significantly as a result of SHOUHARDO inputs. Before the

program, they were not even acquainted with the tomato. Now they are familiar with different types of vegetables and know the scientific procedure of vegetable cultivation. Also, they did not know how to cultivate improved varieties of rice; now they cultivate several improved varieties. Lastly, they are adopting fishery and social forestry by successfully adopting collective initiatives. For example, Jahedul was one of a 30 member fishery committee and a social forestry IGA group. He was able to observe the benefits of working collectively. Along with other SHOUHARDO participants, Jahedul leased a piece of five-bigha land. Since the land was sandy, it was not possible to cultivate rice or tobacco. He started to cultivate corn in the field, as a result of SHOUHARDO's training. In the first year, their net profit was thirty two thousand taka. Then he took lease of another twenty-two bighas of land. He is planning to buy some land of his own.

People in Boroshakoa know about alternative livelihood options, which is particularly important since their cultivatable land remains submerged at least seven months a year. Before SHOUHARDO came here, people spent the time idly. They now have alternative livelihood skills allowing them to cultivate vegetables on the floating bed made from water hyacinth, engage in fishery in a closed area, and do embroidery. In spite of having knowledge and skills, however, successful collective initiative has been absent in this site.

In other three communities, examples of successful collective action regarding livelihood strategies were also absent. For example, as Gachtolaghat is situated in an area which is simultaneously a road and railway junction, river port with a burgeoning population, there are many potential openings for new enterprises. The findings show that new enterprises have not emerged despite SHOUHARDO inputs. In Murikandi, SHOUHARDO participants do not understand the need of collective action to improve adaptation or alternative livelihood strategies. In comparison with the other sites, there was no effective training program from SHOUHARDO. Only some farm animals were provided. Unfortunately, livestock inputs proved unsuccessful since there was no training on how to vaccinate or rear these animals. Similarly, in Purbachatnai where job opportunities such as working in the queries, assisting in smuggling, and working in India were plentiful, livelihood trainings were not available through SHOUHARDO.

4.4.2 Relationship

The poor often have to negotiate with the market within an environment of power imbalance and without adequate knowledge. In Boroshakoa, elite members of VDC worked as the link between SHOUHARDO participants and other elites of the community. Consequently, there was a lack of communication between the SHOUHARDO participants and the larger society. Munna, from the PNGO, was responsible for selling embroideries made by the participants in the markets. He did not pay the dues of participants properly, reporting that the market buyers rejected their work. The incident left a negative impression in the minds of the affected participants and many lost interest in embroideries. Also in Gachtolaghat, the marketing of the IGA products largely depend on the social network of the members, particularly with the owners of shoe box factories. Thus, PEP still need intervention to help them get out of an environment of power imbalance.

4.4.3 Structure

Other than acquiring skills, strong connections with the market, backward linkages and good negotiation skills are essential to achieve self sufficiency. In Boroshakoa, training from the Hunger Project became a significant factor leading to their success. Those who received animator training from the Hunger Project know more about the channels and institutions than those who did not. Consequently, the hunger-project beneficiaries are able to provide inputs and services required for new livelihood options, whereas others lagged behind. Similarly, participation in RDRS, Concern WW in other sites has made some SHOUHARDO participants more advanced than that of others. Thus, PEP's success in affecting the structure by their own has been mixed.

4.5 Positive pro-poor change in local power structure

Among the dimensions of empowerment that were considered in this study, the least advancement was made in relation to shifting power balances. In most cases, the poor failed to increase their influence on the power structures to achieve their goals. Although in some instances VDC/SDC were successful in exerting pressure on the local administration and the elites to act in a pro-poor way, little has changed in the local informal power structure through which the elites control the resources, restrict access to services and influence the political system. This contributes to maintaining the status quo holding the poor dependent on them. To this end, it is crucial for the poor to be able to identify the power structure, to work with their peers to overcome these barriers and to instigate new relationships.

4.5.1 Agency

In most of the cases, the poor were conscious about the unequal power relations in which they live in. For example, in Purbachatnai, they are aware of the unequal power structure which was evident from their attitude toward the exploitative behaviour of owners in stone factories. Clearly, when other options are available they opt not to go to the factories. Also, they are aware that although the local UP member takes bribes from them, they cannot protest against the member because they are dependent on him for social safety nets and want to avoid a backlash from the UP.

Similarly, villagers in Char Varatgopalchara are aware of the unequal power structure and the role of the main actors and centres of power outside their village. They are particularly conscious of their relation with the *jotdars,* who are absentee landowners of their land in the char. The poor here usually maintain a cautious relation with the land lords while engaging in negotiations.

Also, in Boroshakoa, SHOUHARDO participants knew the main actors, such as the Chairman and members of UP, members of panchayet committee, SHOUHARDO staff, and Handicraft marketing agent, Munna. But they did not know where Munna's office was, or how to negotiate with Polli Bidut Shomity to solve their electricity billing problem. Consequently, they are forced to seek help from other elites in solving these problems.

Although participants across sites know about the unequal power structure and can identify the main actors and centres of power, they accept this structure as given. In Murikandi, SHOUHARDO participants are aware about the unequal power structure, but prefer to maintain the status quo. For example, when bribing the members, although they try to trim the amount to be given, most of the time they stay at the losing end in the bargaining process. Lalmoti begum, a participant of SHOUHARDO, tried to give 800 taka to the UP member instead of the 1600 allegedly claimed by the member, but even after repeated requests the member did not change his mind and took his share from the allowance of the first month from her.

4.5.2 Relationship

Although there are some power elites who are sympathetic to the poor they are not playing the role of peers. In most cases they worked with the poor on the issues that also served their own interests. Sometimes, they do help poor in a patron-client relationship, often in order to secure their vote and/or loyalty. But there are also exceptions. For example, in Charvaratgopaljhara, local UP member is one of the sympathetic power elites of the society. As was seen in the cases of the road and the bridge, and as per what the villagers have said, he played an active and pro-poor role. But, he has been an exception.

4.5.3 Structure

In most cases, SHOUHARDO participants participate in local institutions, especially in UP as members of standing committees. However, the larger portion of the community stays out of the system. Not surprisingly, a privileged minority elite within SHOUHARDO groups, who are generally educated males have the opportunity to participate. Also, the participation of most of these members is symbolic, as they play little or no role in the administrative processes.

5. Summary of Priority Findings

5.1 Reduced exploitation and dependency

In terms of agency, SHOUHARDO participants know about their rights. Ample examples of their knowledge about right to *khas* land, right to services from government service providers, legal rights of women, violence against women, dowry and early marriage have been demonstrated during the study. Many participants are capable of taking actions based on their knowledge and they do so in attaining their rights in both household and community levels. However, capabilities and practice vary across sites. We have found that homogeneity of groups (e.g. all equally poor), the presence of imminent threat or common problem in the community and performance of PNGO frontline staff significantly contribute to poor achieving agency so they can reduce exploitation and dependency in their lives.

However, the provision of direct household level input supply makes SHOUHARDO participants believe that they are poor and thus dependent on SHOUHARDO for their material wellbeing. Many interviewees repeatedly expressed that they should have received more material inputs from SHOUHARDO or from the government. Thus, a

relief mentality among many participants has been evident in all sites. The provision of receiving material input from SHOUHARDO has in fact created another level of dependency of PEP.

We have found that poor usually contact their already existing social network that comprises of local leaders and relatives. However, because of SHOUHARDO participation, the poor now also contact the UNO, mayor of the municipality and ward councillor to achieve their rights. In the limited examples where the SHOUHARDO participants initiated collective actions, the government officials and elected local representatives were found to be more responsive.

5.2 Creation of spaces

Findings regarding creation of space for the poor to participate in collective empowerment processes are mixed. The absence of CAP in all sites is troublesome. However, community with strong VDCs (e.g. Charvaratgopaljhara), SHOUHARDO members know about their expected role in collective forums. The local institutions also recognize VDC/SDC as a legitimate pro-poor forum. Nonetheless, in most instances only a few individuals emerge as leaders of these forums and at times they hinder the process of others' effective participation. The problem becomes acute in communities where VDC/SDCs are led by non-poor. But at the same time, non-poor led VDC/SDCs were found to produce better community level livelihood improvements, IGAs and infrastructure development. The dilemma remains whether a development program like SHOUHARDO should concentrate in facilitating creation of space for the poorest at the cost of producing inefficient tangible outcomes or vice versa.

Also, the discrimination in providing household level material inputs and non-poor VDC/SDC members not receiving any material benefit have at times created animosities among participants and affected the process of creating space for all PEP.

5.3 Increased access to services and responsiveness of duty bearers

Across the sites, SHOUHARDO participants know about available social safety net services. They also understand that discussing the availability of these services through collective negotiations may result in better access. Many expressed that access to these services are far worse in the surrounding villages because collective actions are absent. In contrast, in SHOUHARDO villages, the institutions frequently listen to the collective voice and co-opt VDC/SDC members in decision making. Thus, SHOUHARDO has an impact in mobilising institutions to engage with PEP. However, we have also found that the duty bearer institutions do not have the capacity to respond adequately. For example, some UPs do not have a complex of their own. In terms of providing health care services, there is lack of resources including doctors. These supply side problems hinder the realization of access to services as well as responsiveness of the duty bearers. Nonetheless, the state of access to services by the poor and responsiveness of duty bearers have significantly improved by SHOUHARDO intervention.

5.4 Better adaptation/coping strategies in addressing challenges

SHOUHARDO members know about alternative livelihood options. They know the institutions and persons who are able to provide inputs/services required. Especially SHOUHARDO gave training to targeted females and helped them turn the domestic space into production space. However, the flip side is, trained in these strategies the SHOUHARDO participants are more engaged in gaining personal rewards rather than considering the larger good, attained through collective action which would lead to better adaptation and coping. .

5.5 Positive pro-poor change in local power structure

SHOUHARDO participants demonstrate that they know that unequal power structures exist within their communities. They are able to identify sympathetic power elites in the community. However, in most instances, the poor perceive this unequal power structure as a matter of course. Thus, when the poor approach local elites, the implicit hierarchical aspect of their relationship does not decline. In addition, where the SDC/VDC members are from a better economic and social position than that of general SHOUHARDO participants, the process of empowerment remains slow.

5.6 Sustainability

From the above findings it is clear that SHOUHARDO interventions surrounding community empowerment have brought positive changes in PEP's life. Participants have better knowledge about existing services and livelihood options, rights of women, especial needs of pregnant and lactating mothers and other related life skills issues. For example, the mobility of women has significantly increased. Women now frequently negotiate with powerful segment of the society (e.g. UP/PS, government officials, market). In many instances the IGA groups have adopted innovative ways to ensure their sustainability. Many IGA groups have engaged in weekly/monthly savings to be utilised when needed. There is evidence that these groups have arranged leases of land and ponds beyond the SHOUHARDO period. They are able to articulate their future course of action to achieve what they envision for themselves. Thus, there will be a certain level of sustainability around the agency level and maintaining of IGAs. But the flip side is that this kind of sustainability is more needs based than rights based.

We have found that once the poor get involved in SHOUHARDO, they are able to identify the possible ways to mobilize resources within their own community. There is much evidence that following the SHOUHARDO program, the community (both SHOUHARDO and non-SHOUHARDO participants) have initiated other community development projects by themselves. They have tried to utilize resources from other projects (e.g. ADP block grant, 100 days EGP etc) for their own community development by negotiating with UP and other government officials.

However, there is lack of sharing information and working together among different community groups (VDC/SDC, EKATA, IGA and Savings groups, HHN etc). Frequent interaction, integration and coordination of activities among groups may strengthen and accelerate the process of community interaction. Many forum members also expressed the need of such collective initiative.

Also, there is clear evidence that, where the existing VDC/SDC/IGA/occupational group members have participated in earlier rights based initiatives (e.g animators training by the Hunger Project, Concern WW group participation, RDRS group participation etc), they have emerged as the natural leaders for SHOUHARDO. According to the MTR of SHOUHARDO, in a retrospective study of the IFSP Flood Proofing Program in 2002 found that, two years after the close of activities the Local Project Societies (LPS) trained in disaster mitigation activities remained active and worked efficiently when faced with a flooding threat. Hence, it is highly likely that the SHOUHARDO group members will carry their skills and empowerment beyond the life of the program. Given the fact that SHOUHARDO had a delayed start, the implementing agencies did not get enough time to concentrate on empowerment and rights issues, this level of achievement is indeed praiseworthy.

5.7. Number and Quality of PNGOS

SHOUHARDO implementation mainly depends on PNGOs. Hence, it is of utmost urgency that these frontline PNGOs themselves believe in the SHOUHARDO message and philosophy. It is difficult for the CARE staff to ensure that all the PNGOs are working with same standard and rigour, given the number, size and administrative quality of the PNGOs.

Moreover, field staff and community volunteers did not receive adequate training themselves to communicate abstract ideas of 'empowerment' and to facilitate ways that PEP can apply these concepts to become more powerful. Regional staff may provide additional training and direct support to field staff and community volunteers to determine the best ways to communicate and carry out ideas related to empowerment at the community level.

6. Recommendations

The social change processes, supported by SHOUHARDO, require time to realize. Such processes involve changing the behaviours and mind set of PEP who have been oppressed by the local elite. The elite also need recognize that they have captured most of the resources and must let go of the control over PEP while accepting PEP have equal rights of their own. Despite significant progress of SHOUHARDO to this end, this huge task is not likely to be achieved in a five-year span. Thus, we first recommend that similar programs with the same target population should be continued for at least another five-year term. While the current program will successfully establish the institutional mechanisms that will allow for such change to occur in a sustainable manner, the next phase will ensure that these changes do take place and sustain. Keeping this core recommendation at the centre, this thematic study provides the following recommendations for future programming.

6.1 *Community Action Plan (CAP)*

The creation of a new recognized institution that can negotiate new power relationships on behalf of the interests of PEP is a key vehicle to change, in the SHOUHARDO program. As the key vehicles of change, SHOUHARDO groups (VDC/SDC, EKATA, IGA/occupational groups etc) should claim rights on behalf of PEP. In so doing they

aim to acquire resources and services to which PEP are legally entitled. Community produced and owned CAP is the essence of empowering this forum. Hence the first recommendation is that the CAP intervention, which is largely not being implemented, should be reinforced. The material input supply should be flexible enough to meet the demands of the CAP. Because of a delayed start of SHOUHARDO and provisions for simultaneous supply of hardware and software inputs, the implementing NGOs concentrate more on the "burn rate" (spending the allocated budget to show the progress). This hastiness in supplying material input has discouraged to bring the CAP in the centre of community empowerment. If the similar program in future follows a sequential program implementation cycle, this problem may be minimized.

6.2 Composition of SHOUHARDO groups

The program approach requires that committees are to be comprised of PEP members of the community. However, in practice at least three of the five VDC/SDCs are dominated by non-poor (as key position holders and decision makers are non-poor). The inclusion of non-poor may create a situation where the apparently sympathetic pro-poor elites of the community become patrons for PEP if they remain as the dominant decision makers. Consequently, instead of breaking the unequal power structure, they may reinforce and sustain this structure. In four of five sites, PEP VDC/SDC members could not adequately answer the questions related to their collective level agency and relationships. Instead, they frequently referred to the non-poor leaders for answering questions asked. Thus, we recommend that collective action forums exclude non-poor members as active group members. Instead, they can act as advisors or honorary members (without any decision making power).

6.3 Introducing EKATA in all communities

The most visible component of women's empowerment implementation model is the group of women at adolescent and adult ages—the Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action (EKATA) groups that meet regularly to discuss major social issues. Most of these groups have discussed issues of social importance, engaged in a problem-solving process, and have formulated plans of action. EKATA trainings following the REFLECT model seem to work very well when it comes to realizing rights. In one site, where there was no EKATA, the level of knowledge and practices in realizing rights has been found lower than other four sites. Hence, EKATA should be integrated across all sites, not a selected few.

6.4 Integrating the activities of all community based groups

The community savings groups, IGA groups, the EKATA groups, the HHN groups, and the VDC/SDC are all separate community entities but they all represent the same mission of change. However, there is lack of information sharing and working together among these groups. Frequent interaction, integration and coordination of activities among groups may strengthen and accelerate the process of community empowerment. Many forum members also expressed that they felt the need of such collective initiative. One bi-monthly general meeting for all forums may be piloted in the next program design.

6.5 Integrating indigenous good practices with new technologies

SHOUHARDO staff and VDC/SDCs should identify traditional community level good practices and adaptive models and reintroduce and reinforce them within SHOUHARDO. In all five sites such initiatives were not adequately reported. Thus, we recommend that emphasis is given on integrations of indigenous practices and modern technologies. It will also help non-SHOUHARDO community members to be more willing to accept/accommodate SHOUHARDO interventions. As a result, a wider level of community empowerment will take place.

6.6 Community versus household level hardware supply

The current SHOUHARDO supplies inputs to both the community and household levels. However, household level inputs vary in their types and material value. Some participant households are discriminated against others (e.g. one household receiving seeds of vegetables while another household receiving a cow). This situation creates animosity among SHOUHARDO participants and affects the success of the collective group. Thus, we recommend that material inputs supply should be limited only to the community level that will bring collective well-being for the whole community. The comprehensive fishery and social forestry initiative in Charvaratgopaljhara may be referred to as a good example of such initiative.

6.7 IGA support at the household level

Individual PEP households also require program support. Thus, besides community level input supply, the household level intervention is also needed for a holistic level of development. IGAs are a good way to bring economic well being directly and social well-being indirectly for PEP. However, we recommend that IGA should only include training on behalf of the program and then provide them with a "no-interest" loan with a grace period of at least 6 months (during these 6 months, a small stipend to sustain the IGA may be introduced like BRAC-TUP, CLP etc. This stipend may also be considered as a part of the loan). If the fund available for direct household level input supply is utilized in this manner, it will help PEP participants to dispose of their passive recipient mode sustained by a relief mentality and transform them as active participants in changing their situation. This approach would boost their self esteem and self-agency which would empower them further.

VDC/SDC may be trained to manage and operate their "no-interest" loans. This activity will help VDC/SDC to sustain beyond the project life. Moreover, the fund will remain within the community and will revolve to help other PEP households. A portion of the fund may be allocated for administrative set up and operating expenses of VDC/SDC. However, in designing such component, the program has to be very cautious so that there is no possibility of these VDC/SDCs becoming mini micro-credit organizations themselves. The provision of "no interest" has to be followed very strictly.

6.8 Savings group and matching fund

To help the savings groups' activities, in the absence of household level material input supply, along with no-interest loan, matching grants may be allocated for different

savings groups initiated by the program (For details, CARE-FoSHoL groups' matching grants system may be referred). This grant will help these groups to sustain.

6.9 Cutting down the number of PNGOs

As SHOUHARDO implementation mainly depends on PNGOs, it is of utmost urgency that these frontline PNGOs themselves believe in the SHOUHARDO message and philosophy. It is difficult for the CARE staff to ensure that all PNGOs are working with same standard and rigour, given the number, size and administrative quality of the PNGOs. Indeed, it is difficult to transfer appropriate technologies and training to so many PNGO staff. Thus, SHOUHARDO-PNGO relationship remains a significant challenge to achieve the goal of community empowerment across the board. For the next phase of SHOUHARDO or similar programs, SHOUHARDO may consider reducing the number of PNGOs significantly in order to ensure the smooth implementation of the software components of the program.

6.10 Transforming frontline staff and SHOUHARDO volunteers into "Social Change Agents"

It has been observed during the field visits that field staff and community volunteers did not receive adequate training themselves. Many do not have necessary skills to communicate abstract ideas of 'empowerment' and to facilitate ways that PEP can apply these concepts to become more powerful. Instead, many very active frontline staff spend their time in managing specific cases involving individual community members (e.g. facilitating resolution of dispute between husband and wife), not the whole community. Though it is challenging to draw the line between individual versus community level work, we recommend that regional staff provide additional training and direct support to field staff and community volunteers to determine the best ways to communicate and carry out ideas related to empowerment at the community level.

7. Prioritizing SHOUHARDO interventions in community empowerment

We have extensively studied the community empowerment methods and approaches introduced by SHOUHARDO for the thematic study. These methods and approaches cover all four SOs. Based on our field level findings, at least three interventions stand out to be most effective and should hence be continued. These are VDC/SDC, EKATA and IGA based groups. On the other hand, linkage with UP through memberships of SHOUHARDO participants in standing committees, inclusion in SMC/PTA have not been very productive.

VDC/SDC brings a community together. Working on CAP provides them with the broader community level problem identification and solving skill. VDC/SDC is the first collective forum where PEP may develop/demonstrate their leadership skills and by working for the community they achieve self esteem. These newly achieved confidence, leadership skills and self esteem will help them to get rid of relief mentality and become active citizens of the country. The provision of including women in VDC/SDC leadership positions also helps women to assert their voice equally with men regarding issues of overall community level development. In fact, VDC/SDC and CAP are the best ways for entering into a community.

EKATA has come out as the most visible women's empowerment intervention in all four sites. In this forum, women and adolescent girls can get together, discuss their problems and find ways to solve them. They learn about women's rights in this forum. In Bangladesh, women still hesitate to discuss their personal problems in public especially in front of men. Thus, many problems that they suffer remain unspoken in VDC/SDC. EKATA works as an important platform in addressing these women-related issues and problems.

Being one very important component of SHOUHARDO program interventions, IGA based groups have the economic well-being of its' members at the core which works as a glue to bind the group together and sustain it. Once PEP members (confined within an unequal power structure) face the challenges of maintaining a group activity by minimizing in-group conflicts and problem, they learn the life skills necessary for not only their livelihood development but their rights-based empowerment.

In contrast, inclusion in UP standing committees did not bring very good results. In fact, UP standing committees themselves are mostly inactive. Also, in many instances these committees are dominated by political parties. Thus, inclusion of SHOUHARDO participants has not been able to bring significant pro-poor policy changes in UPs. Instead, VDCs should be encouraged to maintain communication with UP chair and members and negotiate collectively to meet their demands. Evidence of such negotiations has been recorded during our field visits. When we visited the Upazilla and interviewed the UNO and other officials they complained that PNGOs do not sufficiently utilize the available upazilla level government resources, services and technical support. Upazilla forums have mostly become information sharing sessions rather than a platform for collective actions. PNGOs and VDCs may be encouraged to work together to include Upazilla officials in local development.

Similarly, inclusion of SHOUHARDO participants in SMC and PTA has not demonstrated in positive results in the realm of community level empowerment. Instead, ECCD schools, another SHOUHARDO intervention which is not directly linked to community empowerment, has been proved to be an important vehicle of community empowerment. SHOUHARDO participants who are involved in managing the ECCD schools have mentioned their involvement with pride. In all five sites, ECCD schools are running well and the communities mentioned that they plan to continue the schools beyond SHOUHARDO life by mobilizing resources from within the community. Based on this analysis we recommend that future program should continue with VDC/SDC, EKATA and IGA groups. It may discontinue working with UP standing committees, SMC and PTA. Other SO specific group like HHN group, mothers' group, PIC may be continued based on the need of SOs.

7. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study we conclude that SHOUHARDO interventions have been successful in transforming the targeted PEP's lives and social realities to a great extent. In general, the right based approach of SHOUHARDO has worked well as the participants are aware about their rights, better informed regarding the ways of realizing them and have set several successful examples in attaining their rights. Also the

empowerment approach has been successful to a certain level. Both the understanding about their social milieu and the extent of their social network have increased significantly as was PEP's participation in different institutions. Moreover, their action regarding income generating activities and savings can be deemed as both flourishing and sustainable, although in several cases the drive seems to be more individualistic rather than collective. The local institutions and the larger society have become more responsive and accountable to general public as a result of the collective actions initiated by the community based organizations.

Although these findings can be attributed to the community as a whole, the progress in the understanding and the network of the marginalized is still not fully satisfactory. There are instances where the poor tend to see these issues from the angle of needs rather than rights. Although in most of the cases SHOUHARDO leadership has developed considerably but the development in this regard confide on factors like the extent of social network, education, status and class of the key position holders of SHOUHARDO groups. But, effective leadership judged on the basis of efficacy also creates the impasse by hindering the participation of the marginal and poor. Another factor is the composition of the group as the homogeneity has been an important factor for cohesiveness of the group. Then again, creating a group that bank decisively on a particular section of the society creates the concern of segregation from the larger society and also possible exclusion of the marginal segment within the group from the group. These issues need to be given due importance in designing similar program in future. Finally, we recommend that the lessons learned from the implementations of the rights-based approach of SHOUHARDO should be fully utilized for further program interventions. Discontinuation of a program like SHOUHARDO just after one project cycle will not be desirable from a rights-based development perspective.

Annex A

Community Empowerment instrument

Study objectives:

a) to assess how effectively community empowerment approaches and systems are contributing to positive change, and how sustainable these changes are.
b) to provide recommendations on how the approaches and systems can be improved for future community empowerment programming, especially in relation to the 'impact statement' and 'impact groups' that CARE Bangladesh is committed to.

SO1: Improved availability/economic access to food through strengthening livelihoods, entitlements and enhancing accountability of service providers.

AGENCY: Poor SHOUHARDO members exercising <u>choice</u> with available options

RELATIONSHIPS: Poor SHOUHARDO members <u>negotiating</u> of needs and rights through <u>interdependence, cooperation</u> with others.

STRUCTURE: Poor SHOUHARDO members changing <u>institutions</u> (markets, education system, committees, gov), <u>norms</u> (socialized), <u>values</u> (religious/cultural) through active inclusion.

Indicators		**Areas of research**		
	Themes	**Agency**	**Relationship**	**structure**
1. Reduced exploitation and dependency	1.1. Knowledge and attitudes	If the SHOUHARDO participants know about their rights/entitlement (e.g. rights to khas land; water bodies)	Who are the people that poor contact to achieve their rights (e.g. local leaders; relatives, govt officials)	What are the institutions available to achieve their rights (e.g Upazila Admin; UP, land office)
	1.2 Capabilities	If the knowledge of rights make them capable to initiate collective action	Who are the people that play role in enabling/disabling poor's capabilities to engage in collective action	What are the institutions that play role in enabling/disabling poor's capabilities to engage in collective action
	1.3 Participation	If the SHOUHARDO participants engage in collective action to attain their rights	How the relationships is affected by this collective action	If the institutions become more accountable to the poor

Indicators		**Areas of research**		
	Themes	**Agency**	**Relationship**	**structure**
2. Creation of spaces	1.1. Knowledge and attitudes	If the SHOUHARDO participants know about their expected role in collective forum If they are aware about other such platforms	What is the nature and extent of interaction between SHOUHARDO participants and other actors in the community	If local institutions have accountability process (e.g citizens' charter)
	1.2 Capabilities	If the SHOUHARDO participants articulate the necessity of being a part of the group	If the SHOUHARDO participants motivate other local elites and poor to support the SHOUHARDO causes	If the local institutions recognize the VDC/SDC as a legitimate pro-poor forum
	1.3 Participation	If the SHOUHARDO participants actively and regularly participate in their planned activities If they participate in any other collective forums	If other community members participate in these activities	If local institutions accommodate these collective activities with policy changes

3. increased access to services	1.1. Knowledge and attitudes	If the SHOUHARDO participants know about available services (e.g SSN, 100 days EGP)	If the SHOUHARDO participants know about who are the recipients of these services and who select them	If the SHOUHARDO participants negotiate with institutions to get increased access to services
	1.2 Capabilities	If they understand that discussing about these services and collective negotiations may result in better access	If the SHOUHARDO participants can negotiate with community elites and poor to work together	If the institutions are willing to listen to the collective voice
	1.3 Participation	If they collectively negotiate with the authority to receive these services	If the SHOUHARDO participants work together with community elites and poor	If the institutions listen to the collective voice and co-opt SHOUHARDO participants in decision making

Indicators		**Areas of research**		
	Themes	**Agency**	**Relationship**	**structure**
4. Increased responsiveness of the duty bearers	1.1. Knowledge and attitudes	If the SHOUHARDO participants know what are the role of the duty bearers	If the SHOUHARDO participants know that discussion about duty bearer's responsibilities with community elites and poor may help to make them more responsive	If the duty bearer institutions acknowledge the need of the poor under their jurisdiction
	1.2 Capabilities	If the SHOUHARDO participants can differentiate among different institutions' role	If the SHOUHARDO participants discuss about duty bearer's responsibilities with community elites and poor	If the duty bearer institutions are equipped enough to be adequately responsive
	1.3 Participation	If they collectively negotiate with the institute to make them more responsive to their needs	If the SHOUHARDO participants work together with community elites and poor	what are the mechanisms for the institutions to be responsive and how frequently they are responsive

5. Better adaptation/coping strategies in addressing challenges	1.1. Knowledge and attitudes	If the SHOUHARDO participants know about alternative livelihood options?	If the SHOUHARDO participants are aware about available livelihood options in the community	If SHOUHARDO participants know that institutions are able to provide inputs/services required for new livelihood options
	1.2 Capabilities	If the SHOUHARDO participants understand that collective action may lead to better adaptation/coping strategies	If the SHOUHARDO participants are willing to discuss these options with community elites and poor	If SHOUHARDO participants know how to negotiate with institutions for inputs/services required for new livelihood options
	1.3 Participation	If the SHOUHARDO participants adopt any collective level adaptation/coping strategies	If other community members play role in these adaptation/coping strategies	If the institutions get involved in this process

Indicators		**Areas of research**		
	Themes	**Agency**	**Relationship**	**Structure**
6. Positive pro-poor change in local power structure	1.1. Knowledge and attitudes	If the SHOUHARDO participants know that there is an unequal power structure	If the SHOUHARDO participants know who are the sympathetic power elites in the community	If SHOUHARDO participants know that they can participate in local institutions
	1.2 Capabilities	If the SHOUHARDO participants can identify the main actors/centers of power	If the SHOUHARDO participants have access to these power elites	If SHOUHARDO participants are willing participate in local institutions
	1.3 Participation	If the SHOUHARDO participants negotiate with these actors to attain their rights/entitlements	If the SHOUHARDO participants work together with pro-poor power elites	If SHOUHARDO participants are participating in local institutions