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USAID award number (contract, cooperative agreement, grant, etc.): FFP-A-00-04-00079-00	
Strategic Objective (SO) title: MYAP Annual Results Report FY09	SO number:
Project title: CARE Bangladesh –MYAP SHOUHARDO	Project number:
Document title/translated title: CARE Bangladesh –MYAP SHOUHARDO	
Author(s): CARE Bangladesh	
Contractor or grantee name(s): CARE-USA	
Sponsoring USAID operating unit(s): Food For Peace	



Language: English	Publication date: 11/2/2009
<p>Abstract <i>(summary of most significant information, 250 word limit; optional):</i> SHOUHARDO (Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities) is a five year eight month program operating from October 2004 to May 2010, funded by USAID and the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). . The overall program goal is ‘to sustainably reduce chronic and transitory food insecurity of vulnerable households (HH) in 18 districts of Bangladesh, by 2009’. The Program was reaching a total of 407,309 HHs in 2,205 villages and 137 slums, but over this reporting period lost beneficiaries due to char erosion and permanent migration. The total number of beneficiaries now stands at 401,260.</p> <p>As SHOUHARDO approaches its completion date, the Program considered it appropriate to conduct a comprehensive Impact Assessment to measure progress on two indicators – ‘stunting’ and ‘wasting’. The findings demonstrate SHOUHARDO has been successful in reducing the prevalence of both ‘stunting’ and ‘wasting’, where severe stunting has been reduced by 43% and severe wasting has also been reduced by around 74%. These results are especially important as SHOUHARDO employs a model which delivers at scale. The Impact Assessment was undertaken by ICDDR,B where a sample of 3,200 children were taken in the survey, to ensure a statistically significant result was obtained. The sample children taken for this study, randomly selected, were all children taken at the time of the baseline survey. 50% of these were children sampled in the baseline, the other 50% were children who were not taken as a sample in the baseline. The purpose of this was to determine no undue advantage was given to the sampled children at baseline. The results from both cohorts are similar thereby confirming all beneficiaries in SHOUHARDO were equally treated.</p> <p>What is most interesting is that at the time of the baseline, all these children were under two years of age. In the Impact Assessment, these children were now all between the age of 3 to 5, which effectively meant they had not received any additional rations as part of the Mother and Child Health Nutrition (MCHN) program for over a year. This indicates these HHs were able to continue to bring in sufficient food for the overall HH, after they graduated from the MCHN program. This fact alone can be taken as a strong proxy indicator that the overall well-being of HHs have improved in terms of income and food production, the money they spend on food, and their knowledge levels where they are diversifying their diets to include more nutritious food. Sustainability of progress made is also strengthened by the fact these HHs have continued to be able to provide nutritious food after graduating from the MCHN program.</p> <p>Clearly these results demonstrate the Program has made important steps in strategizing, and implementing a model which brings substantial and sustainable positive change to people’s lives.</p>	
<p>Keywords <i>(suggested terms to describe content of document; optional):</i> CARE Bangladesh; SHOUHARDO; stunting; Wasting; children under 2 years; Mother and Child Health Nutrition (MCHN) program; nutrition; food for peace</p>	

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AID 590-7 (09/05)

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1. Annual Food Aid Program Results

SHOUHARDO (Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities) is a five year eight month program operating from October 2004 to May 2010, funded by USAID and the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). . The overall program goal is ‘to sustainably reduce chronic and transitory food insecurity of vulnerable households (HH) in 18 districts of Bangladesh, by 2009’. The Program was reaching a total of 407,309 HHs in 2,205 villages and 137 slums, but over this reporting period lost beneficiaries due to char erosion and permanent migration. The total number of beneficiaries now stands at 401,260.

As SHOUHARDO approaches its completion date, the Program considered it appropriate to conduct a comprehensive Impact Assessment to measure progress on two indicators – ‘stunting’ and ‘wasting’. The findings demonstrate SHOUHARDO has been successful in reducing the prevalence of both ‘stunting’ and ‘wasting’, where severe stunting has been reduced by 43% and severe wasting has also been reduced by around 74%. These results are especially important as SHOUHARDO employs a model which delivers at scale. The Impact Assessment was undertaken by ICDDR,B where a sample of 3,200 children were taken in the survey, to ensure a statistically significant result was obtained. The sample children taken for this study, randomly selected, were all children taken at the time of the baseline survey. 50% of these were children sampled in the baseline, the other 50% were children who were not taken as a sample in the baseline. The purpose of this was to determine no undue advantage was given to the sampled children at baseline. The results from both cohorts are similar thereby confirming all beneficiaries in SHOUHARDO were equally treated.

What is most interesting is that at the time of the baseline, all these children were under two years of age. In the Impact Assessment, these children were now all between the age of 3 to 5, which effectively meant they had not received any additional rations as part of the Mother and Child Health Nutrition (MCHN) program for over a year. This indicates these HHs were able to continue to bring in sufficient food for the overall HH, after they graduated from the MCHN program. This fact alone can be taken as a strong proxy indicator that the overall well-being of HHs have improved in terms of income and food production, the money they spend on food, and their knowledge levels where they are diversifying their diets to include more nutritious food. Sustainability of progress made is also strengthened by the fact these HHs have continued to be able to provide nutritious food after graduating from the MCHN program.

Clearly these results demonstrate the Program has made important steps in strategizing, and implementing a model which brings substantial and sustainable positive change to people’s lives.

Table 1 provides more detailed progress on specific higher level indicators.

Table 1 – Progress till Quarter 4 FY 2009 on Specific Higher Level Indicators

Indicators	Unit of Measurement	Baseline	LOA/ER	Progress to Date
Adequate food provisioning months	Number of Months	5.2	8	7.56
Food groups consumed	Food Group	5.1	6	5.9
Access to safe drinking water	Number of HHs	68,021	203,654	267,406
	Percentage of HHs	17	50	66
Access to hygienic latrines	Number of HHs	70,057	244,385	285,525
	Percentage of HHs	17	60	70
Prevalence of underweight (weight for age)	Percentage of children	57	53	23
Rate of Diarrhea	Percentage of children	23	18	4
Income per month	BDT (mean value)	2,133	2,560	3,410
Expense on food	BDT (mean value)	1,608	1,930	2,333
Depend on seasonal migration	Percentage of HHs	43	36	18.8
Sell service/ labour in advance	Percentage of HHs	15	12	3.8
Average score on Management Capacity Matrix	Percentage	34	75	82
Community aware of different service providers and what they offer	Number		1,756	2,124
HHs (P&EP) receiving assistance from any service providers	Number of HHs		244,385	301,115
Communities maintaining infrastructure	Number	0	1,171	1,479
Communities with total sanitation	Number	0	1,405	1,274
Women reporting significant participation in household decision-making	Mean Score	9	18	13.2
Women's groups who have developed action plan and implemented these	Number	0	400	408
Women's group linked to regional and national women's groups and NGO bodies that raise and deal with issues related to women	Number	0	50	53
Average score on management Capacity Matrix (Disaster Management Committee)	Percentage	31	75	84

On the whole, the results from Table 1 are very encouraging. Notably, access to safe drinking water (target was to reach 50% of beneficiaries; where achievement was 66% which is a 49% improvement to the baseline) and hygienic latrines (target was to reach 60% of beneficiaries; where achievement was 70% which is a 53% improvement to baseline) has exceeded targets. These are prime contributors in reducing the rate of diarrhea (target was to reduce this to 18% from a baseline of 23%; achievement is 4%¹). Income has increased considerably (from a baseline of BDT 2,133 to BDT 3,410, an increase of 60%), as has expenditures on food² (from a baseline of BDT 1,608 to BDT 2,333, an increase of 45%), the number of adequate food provisioning months (gone up from a baseline of 5.2 to 7.56 months in a year), and the types of food groups consumed (up from a baseline of 5.1 to 5.9). These have all collectively had a bearing on the impact made by SHOUHARDO in ‘stunting’ and ‘wasting’.

¹ Diarrhea is highly sensitive to seasonal variations

² These increases do not take into account inflation

Seasonal migration (reduced from 43% to 18.8%, far exceeding the target of 36%) and advance selling of labour (reduced from a baseline of 15% to 3.8%) has declined indicating the overall well-being of HHs have improved where they are no longer compelled to take such action.

From an institutional perspective improvements are also seen where 2,124 communities are now aware of service providers from where they can receive assistance, which is around 91% of all communities SHOUHARDO works with, and 301,115 beneficiaries (74% of overall beneficiaries) have now received some of form of support from such service providers. The average Management Capacity Matrix of these institutions has gone up from a baseline of 34% to 82%, whereas the Management Capacity Matrix score for Disaster Management Committees has gone up from a baseline of 31% to 84%.

In the area of women empowerment, SHOUHARDO has managed to link women beneficiaries to 53 (target was 50) regional and national women's groups and NGO bodies; and develop action plans for 408 (target was 400) women's groups. These are important steps to further elevate the position of women in these communities. In terms of decision making, the Program has managed to assist 13.2% of overall women to have more decision making authority, which is an improvement from the 9% baseline, but more work needs to be done over FY 2010 to reach the target of 18%.

Although the number of communities maintaining infrastructure now stands at 1,479 (or 63% of overall SHOUHARDO communities, which exceeds the target of 1,171 communities or 50%), communities with total sanitation still falls short of the target of 1,405 communities (or 60% of overall Program communities). SHOUHARDO to date has managed to achieve total sanitation in 1,274 communities (or 54%). This shortfall will be covered in FY 2010.

On examining Table 1, it is evident that achievements against inputs resulting in improvements to 'access to safe drinking water', and 'access to hygienic latrines', have far exceeded the targets originally set over the Life of Activity (LoA). The reason for this is primarily due to assets such as tubewells and hygienic latrines being used by neighbouring community members, who are also SHOUHARDO beneficiaries, but have not benefited as yet from such structures. The spirit of solidarity remains strong in many of these areas, which needs to be nurtured and further promoted to reach more of the Poor and Extreme poor (PEP).

The targets set for the variables 'income per month' and 'expenditure on food', may have been appropriate when first set, although the achievement exceeds the targets. The reason why such favourable results may be observed is because the cost of inflation has not been factored in these results.

Targets against the institutional variables 'community awareness of service providers', and 'HHs receiving support from service providers', have been exceeded as the Program was able to mobilise communities and service providers better than expected. Mass mobilisations as the ones seen in Raipur (where 20,000 people got together to build over a 7 km embankment) and Kewarjore (where several thousand got together to build a 7 km submergible embankment) were important catalysts to galvanise communities and bring in government support structures to assist in the process, all adding to the favourable results.

The Program was also more successful than anticipated when dealing with the difficult issues of ‘seasonal migration’ and ‘advance selling of labour’ where the LoA targets were far exceeded. This is a positive reflection of the range of areas SHOUHARDO deals with when working with a community, strengthening not only food security, but also strengthening and increasing income, as well as dealing with risk reduction and mitigation issues.

The significant component of providing direct food assistance to MCHN beneficiaries came to a close in July 2009. This was an important part of the Program to mitigate under-nutrition of children from the onset to positively impact on ‘stunting’ and ‘wasting’. Food was distributed to ‘pregnant’ and ‘lactating’ mothers to ensure they remain healthy, via which the children they nurse are also kept healthy within the first six months of their lives through breast feeding. A ration equivalent to 250 KCal per day was provided to children above six months and up to two years of age to ensure the child continued to receive an adequate diet in these formative years.

Table 2 summarises the MCHN distribution over FY 2009. The Program distributed in FY 2009 a total of 11,710.328 Metric Ton (MT) of food to 20,203 pregnant women and 77,635 lactating women in the last quarter. This is an achievement of 93.6% to the planned target. Over the LOA, the MCHN program delivered a total of 45,801,222 MT of food, an achievement of 95% to the planned overall target. From the MCHN component there remains a balance of 537 MT – this has been added to the 2,005 emergency stockpile, bringing this stockpile to 2,542 MT.

Table 2 – MCHN Distribution Summary over FY 2009

District				
	Cumulative for FY 09		Cumulative to Date	
	Planned	Achieved	Planned	Achieved
Rangpur	304,374	283,402	1,083,082	1,096,160
Lalmonirhat	519,806	526,624	1,847,608	1,945,270
Kurigram	1,042,202	1,043,056	3,511,858	3,467,318
Gaibandha	393,078	377,146	1,531,502	1,509,991
Nilphamari	262,136	275,870	1,011,920	1,090,439
Jamalpur	1,207,514	984,102	4,237,041	3,768,279
Sherpur	492,800	341,460	1,821,491	1,525,153
Pabna	302,918	229,180	1,136,457	975,905
Bogra	246,400	205,940	923,314	795,410
Sirajganj	717,024	545,104	2,691,878	2,316,860
Tangail	698,544	577,682	2,497,082	2,225,391
Kishoreganj	1,004,850	1,004,850	3,936,051	3,936,051
Hobiganj	639,142	639,142	2,681,658	2,681,658
Sunamganj	1,203,804	1,203,804	4,603,949	4,501,959
Netrokona	689,388	689,388	2,629,221	2,629,221
Chittagong	1,150,758	1,150,758	4,993,307	4,798,689
Cox's Bazar	983,822	983,822	3,801,772	4,097,058
Noakhali	648,998	648,998	3,242,095	2,440,410
TOTAL	12,507,558	11,710,328	48,181,286	45,801,222

The Cash for Work (CFW) component has been going strong over this year. Through CFW, SHOUHARDO involves segments of the target group to construct and produce different structures which directly contributes to the goal and objectives of the Program. These include construction of embankments, flood proofing structures, drains, renovation of access roads and emergency shelters, pond excavation, etc.. Over this reporting period, Table 3 provides an overview of achievement against the CFW component. A total of BDT 66,517,917 (approximately USD 971,064) worth of work was completed in FY 2009, an achievement of 96.6% to the planned target. A total of 25,246 beneficiaries participated in the CFW (target was to reach 24,023 beneficiaries) – 9,854 were women and 15,392 were men. This generated a total of 513,566 person days (PD) worth of work in FY 2009 – 198,654 PDs for women beneficiaries and 314,912 PDs for men beneficiaries.

Table 3 – Summary of CFW over FY 2009

District	Cumulative over FY 09 (BDT)			
	Cumulative over FY 09 (BDT)		Cumulative to Date (BDT)	
	Plan	Acvd	Plan	Acvd
Lalmonirhat	4,115,774	4,165,175	6,785,064	6,503,275
Kurigram	7,064,760	7,066,231	11,864,085	14,290,603
Rangpur	2,751,240	2,644,680	6,432,032	4,892,826
Gaibandha	3,041,760	3,041,760	5,494,812	4,569,060
Nilphamari	1,871,160	1,898,182	4,568,292	4,047,818
Jamalpur	5,882,980	6,069,172	45,680,870	31,525,329
Sherpur	2,169,875	2,095,675	12,938,857	10,073,694
Pabna	2,954,510	2,822,056	17,933,213	10,350,070
Bogra	2,548,070	2,524,320	10,366,653	7,273,738
Sirajganj	4,467,020	4,145,390	53,421,902	33,589,181
Tangail	5,610,940	5,444,451	38,922,430	21,040,732
Kishoreganj	3,945,051	3,775,430	9,403,329	8,039,518
Hobiganj	1,918,275	1,690,050	6,397,256	5,967,677
Sunamganj	6,064,482	5,838,118	12,177,157	11,067,829
Netrakona	3,024,300	2,900,277	6,436,707	6,155,986
Chittagong	4,402,982	3,825,750	8,143,832	7,566,600
Noakhali	2,725,071	2,635,950	10,933,275	10,844,154
Cox's Bazar	4,294,150	3,935,250	7,155,370	6,796,470
TOTAL	68,852,400	66,517,917	275,055,136	204,594,560

The partnership with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) concluded, for the urban partnership, in quarter 4 of FY 2009, and the Flood Forecasting (CFAB) partnership will conclude in October 2009. The CFAB (Climate Forecast Application in Bangladesh) partnership was one of the major technical partnerships of SHOUHARDO where ADPC had three objectives under CFAB:

- i. To develop flood forecasting technology
- ii. To implement the flood forecasting technology in five pilot sites
- iii. To develop 'flash' flood forecasting technology

Against objective one, ADPC has successfully handed over the 10 day flood forecast system to the Flood Forecast Warning Centre (FFWC) under the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD), which now extends their capacity to predict floods from 72 hours ahead of time to 10 days ahead of time. A permanent establishment has been incorporated under the BMD with a high capacity server and a permanent high speed internet connection, which now receives data from the European Centre for Mid Range Weather Forecast (ECMWF) centre in real time. The model has now been tested in 2004, 2007 and 2008 where it has accurately predicted floods in all three years. The dissemination and mobilisation at community level has also worked well in the five pilot areas where communities and regional government counterparts and elected members were trained on how to respond to different prediction levels when received via mobile phones or on the internet.

The 20-25 day prediction system is still under test and will continue to be worked on even after the closing of the SHOUHARDO-ADPC contract as ADPC has a global mandate to continue supporting governments such as Bangladesh in the area of disaster management.

Under objective three, an experimental three day rainfall forecasting has been developed and linked to the meso-scale rainfall forecast models of FFWC. The model is integrated with a 9 km by 9km horizontal resolution and has been showing promising results since 2008.

Steps have been taken to ensure these efforts are sustained where the CFAB model has been incorporated into the national disaster management system through the second phase of the Comprehensive Disaster Management Program (CDMP) funded by donors such as the European Union and DFID. As for maintenance costs, this has been incorporated directly into the BMD and FFWC budgets; and finally, the section known as RIMES is the new wing of ADPC which now has the mandate to continue to support initiatives such as these for the long term.

The final report from ADPC will be received in quarter 1 of FY 2010.

Another important partnership concluded in FY 2009 was the Organising Resource Generation and Nutrition Support (ORGANS) initiative to extend production opportunities through 'floating gardens' in the haor region. The technical partner for this was the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The ORGANS project was implemented from April 2007 to June 2009, reaching a total of 900 HHs in 86 villages, covering four districts. Estimates show that from a floating garden of eight square metres and associated winter garden of 32 square metres, a return of BDT 4,000 to BDT 5,000 worth of vegetable production could be achieved in the space of seven months, and with an input cost of only BDT 600. It was found that in the monsoon season of 2008, 54% of vegetable production was consumed directly by the HH, 33% were sent out as gifts, and 13% was sold in the market. In the winter season 53% was consumed, 9% given as gifts, and 38% sold in the market. The vegetable grown accounted for 50% of the HH's daily vegetable purchase in the monsoon, and 3.5 times that much in winter – consequently, from the improved production HHs were required to spend less purchasing vegetable. On average, it was found that ORGANS beneficiaries increased their income from a baseline of BDT 2,532 per month to BDT 3,281 per month. The final report from IUCN on the ORGANS project is in Attachment H.

Over this reporting period, all seven thematic studies were completed. The topics covered were

- i. Women Empowerment
- ii. Community Empowerment
- iii. Health, Hygiene and Nutrition
- iv. Institutional Mobilization and Good Governance
- v. Food and Economic Security
- vi. Disaster Preparedness
- vii. Infrastructure

Some of the major findings of these studies are summarized below:

- EKATA was found to be highly successful and recommended to be mainstreamed throughout should CARE be successful in being awarded a follow on program
- Status of women has improved where they are more active in decision making, delaying marriage and are now more mobile
- Village Development Committees (VDC) and Slum Development Committees (SDC) are considered to be effective agents of development
- Community Action Plans (CAP) are proving to be effective, and examples are being seen where these are being taken up in the Union Parishad (UP) and Pourashava (PS) budgets
- Service providers are now much more aware of the PEP communities and far more easily accessible
- Infrastructure has played an important role in the overall development and risk reduction of these communities
- Savings program is highly ranked by beneficiaries
- Open defecation is now predominantly gone
- Social standing of beneficiaries has improved
- Good deal of 'secondary adoption' viewed

Some of the major recommendations from these seven studies are as follows:

- Wave protection walls should be continued and expanded in the haor region
- Extend the use of mobile phones and community radios in these hard to reach areas
- Early flood warning system should be scaled up
- Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) and Extended Program on Immunization (EPI) should take place on the same day
- Growth monitoring should be extended to the age of five years
- Provide essential vitamins and minerals using 'monimix' or 'multi-micronutrient powder' to mothers and children from the age of six months

SHOUHARDO started its Final Evaluation in September 2009. The contract had been awarded to the joint bid submitted by Supras Consult of Norway and ADSL Limited in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, CARE was forced to terminate this contract due to the very poor standard of work from this team. The local USAID mission supported this action as it was clear the team lacked the capacity to deliver a report which would be of acceptable quality.

CARE was quick to manage the situation where it has now entered an agreement with TANGO to conduct the evaluation. TANGO will be submitting the final report by end December 2009. The team gathered are of high quality and all very experienced development professionals. Recruiting TANGO, apart from their extensive knowledge of USAID and Title II, has the benefit that they also conducted the Mid Term Evaluation and hence can start more quickly on the evaluation than a fresh team coming in. They have the added advantage of knowing areas which required more attention at the time of the Mid Term which will allow them to track progress made more easily. The results from the Impact Assessment completed by ICDDRDB will be forwarded to TANGO to aid in their Final Evaluation. TANGO will use this data to determine what the actual impact has been on ‘stunting’ and ‘wasting’. The evaluation is expected to begin in the first week of November 2009.

Over this reporting period, the following are some of the more significant challenges encountered.

- Organization of different meetings/workshops and field visit with GoB officials was a challenge due to the National election and the Upazila (UZ) election.
- Delay in provision of input support – particularly procurement of bricks and ducks due to high price and scarcity of ducklings in the market affected timely implementation of planned activities.
- The new government reshuffled government officials at division, district and UZ levels. It took significant time to orient the new officials about the activities of SHOUHARDO and consequently get them on board to provide adequate support for implementing activities.

2. Success Stories

Connecting to Schools, Markets and Success

Mansurnagar is one of six Unions in Kazipur Upazila, located on the Jamuna River's isolated char in Sirajgonj District. Until June 2009, there was no road linking the villages of Uttar Salal and Saldah. With motivation from CARE SHOUHARDO and its partner organisation, National Development Program (NDP), the people of Mansurnagar built this road themselves. The road construction was inaugurated by the Upazila Chairman Bokul Shorkar on 24 May 2009, with more than 5,100 people participating in the construction. The Shorok Bastoban Committee (Road Construction Committee) was formed in early May to mobilize the people.



Habibur Rahman, UP member and President of the Road Construction Committee
Photo Courtesy: Amelia McFarlane, Advocacy Unit, SHOUHARDO

“From 25 villages, every village had a team leader and these were the members of the Central Committee” says Habibur Rahman, local Union Parishad member and Committee President. “Nine members were SHOUHARDO participants and four were women.”

As part of a SHOUHARDO cross-learning initiative, Habibur had been to Warsai Union in Tangail District a few months earlier, where he learnt how to coordinate such a large scale project. The committee also negotiated with around 200 landowners, for soil to be taken from alongside the planned road for building. The Union Parishad took responsibility for the cost of the construction and NDP, CARE and the Upazila representatives supervised and offered technical support before and during the work. SHOUHARDO only donated 150 spades and 300 baskets for carrying soil in the entire initiative.

“Many, many villages will be helped by the road,” says Habibur, “too many to count.”

The four kilometre Bokul Sarkar Road now connects 22 schools, colleges and kindergartens and six main markets. The building of the new road between Uttar Salal and Saldah is in itself an achievement. But even more important are things which it has brought with it. People in Mansanagar are excited about their new prospects and their new-found ability to work together.

“With support from SHOUHARDO, NDP and the government, we now have the knowledge, confidence and courage to make this sort of road again” says Habibur proudly, as he looks out along the new road. He is already quietly making plans for the next big community project.

Access to Khas Land – One Giant Step Towards Sustained Food Security

Saturday 11 April 2009 will be a day to remember for Md Abu Bakkar Siddik and his family from Kawabadha Village in Fulchhari Upazila, Gaibandha. Along with 313 previously landless households from Fulchhari and Sadar Upazilas, Siddik was made the proud lease holder of seven bighas (2.3 acres) of land for 99 years, when he officially received his deed from the Honourable Land Minister Rezaul Karim Hira, at one of two special handover ceremonies held in Gaibandha on the day. The events signalled the start of a series of handing over ceremonies in Lalmonirhat, and Nilphamari, under the Rangpur region and Kalamar Chara, Bamobil Chari under the Chittagong region of SHOUHARDO.



The Land Minister, Rezaul Karim Hira, presenting title deeds to the people of Kawabadha Village

With the support of SHOUHARDO, just under 313 acres of khas land have already been registered to 341 landless households across the poorest regions of Bangladesh, with several hundred applications also pending local government approval. But the khas land application process is complicated. Although Bangladesh's Khas Land Management and Distribution Policy 1997 sets down guidelines for the distribution of common land, there have been several setbacks to the effectiveness of its implementation. Lack of resources and knowledge about the application process, among other things, all create barriers to these entitlements.



Abu Bakkar Siddik

To address these issues, SHOUHARDO organised several workshops and training events, and partnered with the Human Development and Resource Centre (HDRC) at a national level, to undertake an analysis of existing khas land distribution policies, with findings and recommendations presented to the Ministry of Land. However, the spirit of success was best reflected in the words spoken by Md Abu Bakkar Siddik (photo),

"I am happy because for the first time I will cultivate my own land and gain independence. I have suffered from hunger and poverty for many years mainly due to a lack of access to land".

SHOUHARDO believes entitlement to land is a major step in empowering excluded, marginalised, powerless and voiceless people in Bangladesh. Of the 37.4 million acres of land available across the country, 2.4 million acres are recognised as khas land or water bodies. If allotted fairly, this could go a long way to providing food security for the 48% percent of rural households in Bangladesh who are currently landless..

Right to Information – Key to People's Empowerment

A neat tin shack sits on the edge of the paddy field - grazing cows, chickens and golden haystacks complete the scene. From a distance, the environment seems sedate. Nearing the entrance of the small building, you hear the buzz of activity from inside and colourful signs and posters on the outside walls soon come to view.



Md. Humayun Kabir, DC of Bogra
Photo: Amelia, Communications Assistant, Advocacy Unit

The people in Pardebdangha village, under Sariakandi Upazila in Bogra District, have had difficulty accessing government services. All across the mid-char region, poor communication, transportation, and infrastructure makes it a costly affair to move anywhere. But things are changing for the better – at least for the people in Pardebdangha. Their new model village-level service centre is leading the way for another 48 communities across the district – bringing government services, information and local knowledge, to the people.

The Pardebdangha Information and Consultation Centre was inaugurated by the District Commissioner (DC) of Bogra, Md. Humayun Kabir, on 22 January 2009, in the presence of a number of high level Upazila officials. Inside the centre, smiling faces greet us – from the circle on the floor and from the walls, which apart from more posters, are also covered in photographs of recent community events. Hardly a square inch of wall-space remains. It's hard to ignore so much evidence of an enthusiastic and motivated community.



Zillur Rahman, Centre Sub Assistant Agricultural Officer
Photo: Amelia, Communications Assistant, Advocacy Unit

The monthly timetable posted opposite the door contains the names, positions and visiting schedules of Upazila officers who offer their services at the centre on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis: Mosammat Nurjahan Begum, Family Planning Assistant, Upazila Health and Family Planning Office, third Wednesday of the month; Md. Zordis Hossain, Veterinary Assistant, Upazila Livestock Office, second Tuesday of the month. Contact phone numbers are also there – including those of the Union Parishad Chairman – indicating a high level of personal and professional commitment from the local government.

Mosama Shirin Aktar, Treasurer, Village Development Committee (VDC), explains: *“We didn't get access to direct services of the Upazila officers before and we would have to pay transport costs to travel to the old service centre. But even then, we didn't know if the officer would be available at that time or even at that place. We would usually waste our time and money. In many cases, people simply stopped trying. It wasn't worth making the trip. Now we have a schedule and know when and how to contact officers with our problems.”*

3. Lessons Learned

SHOUHARDO is committed to only mentioning those instances which contributes as a lesson to aid and advance programming. Two such lessons are mentioned below.

- i. Numerous examples in SHOUHARDO have proved the assumption for a community to truly mobilise, they need to get motivated around a common issue. This common issue then becomes a ‘catalyst’ to propel the community to perform significant feats. What is most interesting is that by mobilising on a particular issue, in resolving this actually leads these communities to resolve a number of other issues at the same time. Some of the most exciting mobilisations are usually around structures – for example the need for a road to be built to improve communication, or a submergible embankment to protect crop land, etc.. But in constructing these, a number of communities may need to work together resulting in better relations between them; surrounding support structures also participate resulting in elevating the social status and connectivity to these Nation Building Departments (NBD); and also making these NBDs more responsive to the needs of these poorest communities.
- ii. Another significant lesson learnt is that the EKATA model is an excellent approach to ‘women empowerment’. Several thematic studies clearly confirms this, and goes on to recommend that SHOUHARDO scales this up to all its working sites should there be a follow on phase granted by USAID. SHOUHARDO currently operates the EKATA model in 400 of its sites (approximately 15% of its overall coverage). This has been an important ‘pilot’ providing concrete evidence that this is an initiative which needs to be pursued and scaled up.