

Analyzing the Locally-led Development Context: Review of the SHOUHARDO III Interventions



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Acronyms

ANC	: Antenatal Care
BHA	: Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance
BSD	: Business Skill Development
CG	: Community Group
CSC	: Community Score Card
CHCP	: Community Health Care Provider
CLF	: Community Led Facilitator
COVID	: Corona Virus Disease
DHRC-LRA	: Deep Haor and Remote Char Livelihood Recovery Assistance
DRR	: Disaster Risk Reduction
EKATA	: Empowerment Knowledge and Transformative Action
FFBS	: Farmers' Field Business School
FGD	: Focus Group Discussion
GBV	: Gender-Based Violence
GMP	: Growth Monitoring Practice
GoB	: Government of Bangladesh
ICT	: Information, Communications, and Technology
LGI	: Local Government Institution
LSP	: Local Service Provider
MCHN	: Maternal Child Health and Nutrition
MoHFW	: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
PCSBA	: Private Community Skilled Birth Attendant
PEP	: Poor and Extreme Poor
PNC	: Postnatal Care
RFSA	: Resilience Food Security Activity
SAAO	: Sub Assistant Agriculture Officer
SHOUHARDO	: Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities
SS	: Sanchay Sathi
UP	: Union Parishad
USAID	: United States Agency for International Development
VA	: Village Agent
VAW	: Violence Against Women
VDC	: Village Development Committee
VGd	: Vulnerable Group Development
VGf	: Vulnerable Group Feeding
VSLA	: Village Savings and Loan Association
WASH	: Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WE	: Women Empowerment

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I Background

Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO) III is funded by the United States Government through the United States Agency for International Development/Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA), with complementary funding provided by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). SHOUHARDO III works in 947 communities in 115 unions from 23 upazilas in eight districts of the Deep Haor and Remote Char (DHRC) regions in northern Bangladesh to enhance the lives of 725,611 individuals from 170,298 households. The program aims to increase the rural poor's access to public and private services while enhancing their resilience. The SHOUHARDO III program, originally from 2015 to 2020, was extended for two years with additional funding to capitalize and improve the local resources and leadership in order to sustain the interventions that have been in place since 2016.

To facilitate the large-scale program interventions on agriculture and livelihoods (Farmers' Field Business School/FFBS), health and nutrition (Maternal Child Health and Nutrition/MCHN groups and Mother Groups), women's empowerment (Empowerment Knowledge and Transformative Action/EKATA), and governance (Village Development Committees), SHOUHARDO III established community-level thematic groups starting in the program's inaugural year in 2016. The program also established Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) groups to increase community financial inclusion. SHOUHARDO III took a step back from its role in the community groups and with other stakeholders after the midterm evaluation in 2018, which offered recommendations for the implementation of a sustainability strategy and the reduction of direct and continued support in favor of one-off monitoring and sporadic corrective support. Towards this end, gender and age-specific groups were formed that contained sustainability elements of the program, such as close connections between group members with their communities.

The program also developed Community-led Facilitators (CLF) to promote government services, address violence against women, reduce instances of child marriage, assist in recovering from disasters, and provide technical assistance in their communities. Village Development Committee (VDC) leaders, Women Economic Empowerment (WE) leaders, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) leaders, E-Business Actors, and Business Skill Development (BSD) facilitators are among the many CLFs developed by the program. The CLFs received no compensation for their work. Rather, in addition to their regular livelihood activities, they offered their time to help community members who needed services. For the most part, the people selected to be CLFs were community members who already did social work, were respected in their localities, and had strong linkages with the local government/Union Parishad. (SHOUHARDO III, CARE Bangladesh, 2022).

SHOUHARDO III was originally scheduled to run from 2016 to 2020 but was extended for an additional two years to support local leadership and sustain the interventions that have been in place since 2016. This extension phase (hereinafter referred to as S3X) focuses on two major principles: 1) testing, identifying, and promoting service provision models to be used by public, private, and community-based organizations; and 2) mobilizing communities to engage with these service providers to ensure sustainability (SHOUHARDO III, CARE Bangladesh, 2020a). To expand the range of services available to poor and extreme poor (PEP) households and improve

their standard of living, S3X has placed a strong emphasis on local service provision models. The Local Service Providers (LSPs) were developed at the heart of this service provision model to serve hard-to-reach communities where public and private services are scarce (SHOUHARDO III, CARE Bangladesh, 2020b). To sustain the program's benefits and promote effective service provision by utilizing the available local resources, SHOUHARDO III selected, trained, and is currently working with LSPs from various service sectors. The LSPs are now providing agriculture and livestock services, health services, financial inclusion services, WASH services, and technical assistance to communities.

SHOUHARDO III was designed so that people from the community are able to locally access their fundamental needs and find feasible locally-led solutions to their problems. This report is a secondary literature review of SHOUHARDO III's locally-led interventions. This report was prepared by reviewing the program's existing research, studies, knowledge products (secondary literature), strategic project documents, and project progress reports produced over its implementation phase. This report will refer to the program's sustainability framework based on LSPs, functions of the LSPs, and how the LSPs are promoting locally-led interventions. This report will also discuss the impacts of the CLFs and different thematic groups in promoting locally-led developments through ensuring locally-led solutions.

2 SHOUHARDO III Sustainability Framework

SHOUHARDO III's approach to sustainability and long-term impact is predicated upon: 1) sustained resource; 2) sustained capacity; 3) sustained linkage; and 4) sustained motivation.

The following sections provide a synopsis of how the LSPs work at the community level to ensure that fundamental needs are met, promote collective actions, and provide locally-led solutions to problems.



Fig. 1: SHOUHARDO III sustainability framework, Source: SHOUHARDO III project document

Sustained resources – with linkages in place, as well as skills to continuously enhance their crafts, the LSPs seek to be in-the-know by accessing resources (such as training opportunities) from the private and public sector.

Sustained capacities – SHOUHARDO III spent more than two years building up the technical capacities and entrepreneurship skills of LSPs, equipping them to be competitive in their field of expertise.

Sustained linkages – the LSPs are connected to the government and private sector and can communicate freely if they need any assistance.

Sustained motivation – with demands for services in place and a fixed service charge, the LSPs strive to deliver services in PEP communities, providing timely, tailored, and relevant services for their livelihoods and nutrition needs.

This document will analyze the status of the LSPs and thematic groups regarding this sustainability framework and highlight how the LSPs and thematic groups have facilitated locally-led development in rural communities.

3 The Last Mile Providers (LSPs): Making services available at the doorstep

3.1 Agriculture Services

Farmers from the villages produce farm crops (rice, wheat, maize, jute, sugarcane) and vegetables (bean, tomato, gourd, pumpkin, red amaranth, jute spinach, okra). The community no longer needs to visit distant markets to purchase agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilizers; rather they can access these resources in their locality. Farmers purchase seeds based on seasonal needs from the on-farm LSPs, such as Seed Agents developed by the program. They primarily sell vegetable and field crop seeds (such as pumpkin, sweet gourd, red amaranth, bottle gourd, ridge gourd, mustard, okra, and bitter gourd). Seed Agents also sell fertilizers, pesticides, and other necessary agriculture-related products. In addition to the LSP-Seed Agents, the LSP-Seed Dealers provide supplementary services for agricultural production in their shop at the village markets. The Seed Dealers mainly sell field crop seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers. They have strong linkages with the Sub Assistant Agriculture Officer (SAAO) and private seed selling companies (such as Lalteer, Brac Seed, Metal Seed, Syngenta, and Ispahani). Based on suggestions from the SAAO, the Seed Dealers collect seeds from seed producers and company representatives/shops to then sell to the Seed Agents and farmers. The Seed Agents further sell the seeds and provide seed-related advisories to farmers. (Ahsan and Bushra, 2022).

Both the Seed Agents and Seed Dealers advise community people on the following:

- High-yielding, high-quality seeds and agricultural inputs
- Use of cutting-edge technologies during cultivation, such as the sac technique and mobile apps for crop health monitoring
- Use and control of insecticides
- Preparation of the soil before seed planting and seed planting methods
- Application of the correct amount of fertilizers
- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategy
- Encouragement and enhancement of linkages between farmers and the SAAO

Another type of on-farm LSP, the Collector, purchases agricultural produce from farmers to sell in the market. The communities have established strong connections with the Collectors and has benefited from this marketing because they receive a fair price for their produce, are able to negotiate better, and can sell as needed (SHOUHARDO III, CARE Bangladesh 2022).

From production to harvesting produce, the community no longer needs to struggle in obtaining the agricultural inputs and selling them at the market. The agricultural-based LSPs (Seed Agents, Seed Dealers, Collectors) are supporting the community to solve their local issues.

3.2 Livestock Services

Vaccinator LSPs are another type of on-farm LSPs who collaborate with the Department of Livestock Services and private companies to arrange vaccination campaigns for livestock and poultry. The vaccination campaigns are open to anyone in the communities including PEP and non-PEP households. The information on vaccination campaigns is announced to the community using a mic/horn at the community mosques. After hearing the announcement, people bring their livestock/poultry (goats, sheep, cows) to the location of the vaccination camps. The Vaccinators provide their contact numbers to the community so that they can easily reach out to them to treat their livestock and poultry. In addition to providing these technical services, Vaccinators have raised awareness on the necessity of timely vaccination and proper care.

A Vaccinator in Habiganj said, *"I am a Village Doctor (Palli Chikitschok). My main occupation is to treat and vaccinate animals. I have been working in my village as a SHOUHARDO Vaccinator for three years. Due to SHOUHARDO, cattle and poultry rearing has increased in the village, which means that my demand as a vaccinator has also expanded."* Non-PEP FGD participants of Uttar Madhya Katalmari village, Fulchari Upazila, Gaibandha said, *"We do not face any problems in obtaining services from the Vaccinators. When we require vaccination services, even if the Vaccinator is in another far away village, he will either send another Vaccinator or refer us to a veterinarian, if treatment is required."* (SHOUHARDO III, CARE Bangladesh 2022).

3.3 Healthcare Services

In isolated regions with limited access to official healthcare facilities, Private Community Skilled Birth Attendants (PCSBAs) are now offering their services. Health services are available to pregnant and lactating women (PLW) for a low cost, right at their front door. With ongoing direction from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), PCSBAs are enhancing the quality of their services and obtaining the necessary connection support from local healthcare facilities to encourage safe births. They offer need-based services to PLWs, including antenatal care (ANC), postnatal care (PNC), general health examinations, tests for blood pressure and diabetes, and also accompanying pregnant mothers to hospitals. Hasina, from Hashilkandi village of Shaghata Upazila in Gaibandha, shared, *"During pregnancy, I took all services from PCSBA Shumi, starting from the checkup, weight and blood pressure measuring, all the way until child delivery."* (SHOUHARDO III, CARE Bangladesh 2022). PCSBAs also provide Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) services for children and sell common over-the-counter medication for fevers, coughs, colds, and dysentery. Whenever someone from the community requests for health-related assistance, PCSBAs follow up at their home. (Islam. Z., 2022).

3.4 WASH Services

SHOUHARDO III facilitates water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions and mobilizes the community through awareness sessions and capacity building. The program trained LSPs to promote appropriate sanitation and hygiene management solutions. The WASH LSPs in the program areas have contributed to the reduced prevalence of water borne diseases and development of WASH entrepreneurs in the community. SHOUHARDO III is facilitating LSP-based promotion of appropriate sanitation and hygiene management solutions, especially for women and girls. Female WASH LSPs are equipped with the capacity to raise awareness to demand for appropriate sanitation services and facilitate hygiene behavior changes (e.g., hand washing, food hygiene, and menstrual hygiene). Their engagement as LSPs has allowed female LSPs to earn an income for their family and consult in household decision-making. Considering the diverse array of WASH needs in the Haor and Char regions, WASH LSPs provide services including conducting arsenic tests using the HACH Kit, constructing latrine ring-slabs, and repairing/constructing tube well platforms (SHOUHARDO III QPR, 2021).

3.5 Promoting Savings Practices

Sanchay Sathis (SS) are female community leaders in savings, who are chosen for their acceptance and influence in their neighborhood. They form and maintain VSLA savings groups to promote community savings and loan options. In addition to these two fundamental duties, VSLAs have a social welfare fund that the SS actively manages to aid those in need during emergencies. Sanchay Sathi Jesmin, from Gaibandha shared, "*Sanchay Sathi is a one-of-a-kind leader; she facilitates savings groups and motivates the savings attitude in women in the villages.*"

The main components of women's empowerment with VSLAs, as identified by the program include:

- Having access to money in times of need
- Making independent purchases
- Taking out loans when necessary for themselves or their families
- Group cohesion within VSLAs

The SS is a locally-resourced female who leads VSLAs and inspires participants to adopt a more financially prudent mindset. "*Savings groups are an important element in disaster response. We can help others from our welfare fund, and to some extent, the community relies on us when they are struggling,*" shared participants from a FGD in Sirajganj. Women's decision-making power has also improved as a result of their contribution to family expenses (using the money received after group share-outs). They are now involved in important family decisions such as purchasing livestock, selling produce, choosing schools for the children, and many other issues. The women who are also involved in income-generating activities, such as tailoring, use the money they save and receive through share-outs to invest in their businesses. "*Savings makes the future. Rural women*

invest the saved money for income-generating options, such as poultry and livestock rearing and agriculture. They reinvest in businesses, such as grocery shops, clothing, leasing lands, and more. When women manage their own money, they gain respect from their families and communities," stated Sanchay Sathi Shilpi from Netrokona (Ahsan, 2022a).

VSLAs are platforms where the group members can save money together and take out small, low-interest loans from those savings. SHOUHARDO III additionally introduced Sanchay Sathis as a strategy to sustain the intervention beyond the program's term to improve savings habits in communities. The locally-funded Sanchay Sathis are helping the communities, particularly women, by encouraging and inspiring people to start saving, which then leads to their receiving loans for charitable causes and crises (Ahsan, 2022a). These strategies aim to economically empower women to have a long-term effect on the food security situation for PEP. Apart from the share and loan discussions, the VSLA meeting discussion topics include social and communal issues, such as domestic violence, dowry, child marriage, mental abuse, and other relevant topics (Ahsan, 2022a).

4 Community Groups

During outreach with Community Groups (CG) for various Social Safety Nets, including student scholarships, old age allowance, widow allowance, disaster relief, and other necessary funding related to community infrastructure development, the UP and other public offices began to recognize the faces of the CG members. Communities significantly benefited from the CGs' ability to act collectively to receive government attention. Mosiful Begum (32) from Nalchia, Haldia, Saghata, Gaibandha stated, *"Going alone does not work in the UP or any other government office; they do not listen to us. After the flood, we asked the chairman's office to construct a road in our village. We went to the UP office and requested in groups, and then it worked."* Mosiful's CG also managed to obtain old age allowance for five women in their village by reaching out to the UP. She shared, *"As a group, we went to the UP office with multiple objectives, such as road reparations and documents for our children's education. During the floods, we assisted our neighbors in relocating their cattle and assets to households with raised plinths. We also helped a woman with our group savings (not VSLA) for her cesarean delivery expenses."* Similarly, Kobad Ali (55) from the Digdari CG of Bhitband, Nageshwari, Kurigram received an old age allowance with the help of his CG (Ahsan and Bushra, 2022). Additionally, VDCs assisted communities in obtaining financial assistance through government safety net programs, such as the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), widow, old age, and disability allowance from the Union Parishad (SHOUHARDO III, CARE Bangladesh 2022). To ensure effective health service delivery, transparency, and accountability of the service providers, the CGs actively run the Community Score Card process in 48 community clinics. CGs helped communities receive health information as well, such as immunizations for children and pregnant women. The groups also raised awareness on telemedicine services (SHARA health service, CHCP, clinic and hospital's phone number) to increase access to health care, even in remote areas. The CGs also discussed the services they can seek from the SHOUHARDO III-created LSPs, such as Vaccinators, Seed Agents, PCSBAs, Collectors, and WASH LSPs (Ahsan and Bushra, 2021).

In CGs, community members get to know each other. The group structure allows the participants to talk about and share their experiences outside of meeting topics, including personal and family issues, Gender Based Violence (GBV) issues, financial hardships, medical problems, and other sensitive subjects. This has gradually enhanced neighborhood engagement, group problem-solving and decision-making abilities, and other soft skills to create a stronger community (Ahsan and Bushra, 2021).

5 Disaster Risk Reduction and Village Development Committee Leaders

In addition to creating LSPs, SHOUHARDO III also created CLFs, including DRR and VDC leaders, to encourage the development of disaster and climate-resilient communities. The responsibilities of these CLFs include:

- Disseminating pertinent disaster awareness information
- Building capacity
- Reviewing community risk reduction and adaptation contingency plans
- Developing connections with Local Government Institutions (LGI)
- Identifying disaster-safe shelter locations

The LSPs and CLFs give communities early warnings and climate advisories so that they can receive services before, during, and after climate crises. The LSP and CLF service models are groundbreaking and successful strategies for ensuring communities' resilience to natural disasters and climate change.

DRR leaders increased the local ability to respond to disasters and climate change. In terms of comprehensive disaster risk reduction, the DRR leaders have been critical in providing services for backward-forward linkages, disaster preparedness, and early warning services. Additionally, community-level adaptation and risk mitigation increased due to climate advisory services, climate-smart agriculture, low-carbon electricity, and improved cooking stoves (Rahaman, Rashid, and Saba, 2022).

WE leaders increased community awareness to reduce incidents of Violence Against Women (VAW) and provide support to stop child marriage and domestic violence. They used strategies such as courtyard meetings and role-playing to raise awareness on these issues. Sometimes, WE leaders and community women were supported by the UP Chairman or Members to address these critical issues. The participants stated that, compared to before, people are now more conscious of the consequences of child marriage, such as early pregnancy, harmful physical effects, and the death of young mothers. Community members have also learned about the legal age of marriage and required documents (i.e., birth certificate, national ID card) needed to verify the ages of the bride and the groom (SHOUHARDO III, CARE Bangladesh, 2021).

The SHOUHARDO III program districts are all at risk of flooding due to their geographic positioning. The Haor areas are prone to flash floods and the Char areas are sensitive to monsoon floods. During the flood that occurred from May to June 2022, the CLFs, (e.g., DRR and VDC leaders) helped women-led households and other highly vulnerable groups (people with

disabilities, elderly, PLW, and children) to take their assets and shift to safer places. After the floodwater receded, the villagers supported each other in repairing their houses, which indicates that the social capital within communities has significantly increased. Because the community had adopted better preparedness measures in advance (such as preserving dry food and firewood, cattle feed, portable cooking stove, lifesaving medicine, selecting flood shelter, and preparing small boats and banana rafts), the flood did not affect them as much as it would have previously. This is an indication of the resilience capacity that has been strengthened in SHOUHARDO III communities. DRR and VDC leaders communicated with the UP, government departments, and non-government organizations to document flood-affected households that needed further support to recover from the loss and damage (SHOUHARDO III Quarterly Progress Report, 2022). Rising floodwaters overflow and breach embankments, which damages the infrastructure, including houses, schools, roads, and bridges. In these cases, the community usually communicates with the UP and the Upazila Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) office to place their demand for an initiative to repair the damaged community infrastructures.

The community, led by the Community Group leaders and/or VDC chairs, also took the initiative to collect money from community members, with their improved conversation and negotiation skills and linkages with program staff. They spent the money on purchasing raw materials needed for building or repairing bridges (especially those made with bamboo), roads, or schools (Ahsan and Bushra, 2021).

Upon receiving extensive leadership and capacity-building support from the program, the VDC, CG, SS and DRR leaders are now convinced that they can achieve many good things for the well-being of their communities. With the leadership qualities attained, 22 SHOUHARDO III participants were elected in the 2021-22 Union Parishad Election. Among them, 14 were male and 16 were female. This demonstrates that the participants have become trusted, within and outside of SHOUHARDO III communities, for their integrity, hard work, ability, and positive outlook for helping communities. Through this platform, leaders have gained the authority to raise their voice on behalf of the interests of the underprivileged community members. In other words, it has explored the opportunity for the underprivileged to voice their opinions on government platforms and solidify their rights.

6 Sustained Linkage with the Government and Non-Government Actors

The communication with local public offices (such as the Union Parishad, Union Digital Center, Public Health, Community Clinics, Agriculture Office, disaster preparedness and relief, and women's and child's affairs), have increased due to the reformed CGs. Women's movement in public spaces, such as in markets, neighborhood areas, clinics and other places has increased due to the continued motivation from the CGs.

The adult CG members mentioned that social unity and bonding has improved among the members since 2019. The CG members participated in different community development initiatives in the past two years, developed new personal and professional connections, and improved communication with the local government offices (Ahsan and Bushra, 2021). Local

government and public offices recognized the CG leaders and members, and reached out to the groups to ensure the availability of public services (Ahsan, 2022b). SHOUHARDO III facilitated collaboration meetings between the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), UP, and like-minded INGOs to influence them to provide water and sanitation support for program participants.

To continue strengthening the linkages between PCSBAs and Upazila-level Health and Family Planning representatives, SHOUHARDO III organized and facilitated Skill Lab Learning Sharing meetings. This platform allows PCSBAs to voice the challenges they face and receive technical assistance from government health care representatives. In addition, the program also facilitated government-led Upazila Nutrition Coordination Committee (UNCC) meetings and District Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC) meetings. These linkage meetings between PCSBAs and health care actors have also increased the confidence of both parties that this coordinated effort will continue once the SHOUHARDO III program has phased out (SHOUHARDO III, QPR, 2022).

Considering the potential of online marketing, the program started to work with ekShop¹ by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). SHOUHARDO III participants have already started to post their agricultural products, including red chili, rice, honey, groundnut, and cow in the ekShop online platform. PEP farmers previously had no access to the online platform for selling their products. This access allows them to learn about virtual marketing and gain a wider customer base. (SHOUHARDO III project document, 2022)

SHOUHARDO III had a particular focus on output market linkages for selling agricultural products from local farmers. To do this, the program continued to build linkages with Bengal Meat² who has already started to purchase cows from the program participants. Bengal Meat offers trainings for SHOUHARDO III farmers on improved cattle rearing processes, including the implementation of farmer contracts to supply cattle to companies. Bengal Meat also enlisted farmers to provide with their Cattle Supply Card, which gives them access to the entire support of the company, including embedded treatments from company experts, credit support, and selling the end product (cattle) as a permanent supplier.

7 Conclusion

SHOUHARDO III has been working to support communities create service demand, ease access to services, and make services available at the community level. The services include agriculture and livestock, health and nutrition, disaster risk and reduction, women empowerment, and governance, which are considered a community's fundamental needs, especially for the remote

¹ Online platform for the producers

² A private meat producer company

areas where the private and public services are limited. The program's approach has been to sustain the services at the community level and create long-term positive impacts on community livelihood.

The programmatic approach of CG development was vital in strengthening community bonding and solidarity. This social cohesion accelerated collective action to claim their rights to public and private offices, and to build or repair infrastructures and roads. Moreover, the program-developed CLFs promoted public and private services for the community people and raised awareness about their rights to seek those services. They also played a critical role in developing awareness in communities about VAW, women empowerment, good governance, and how to demand their rights from relevant authorities. The increased awareness on their rights to seek services and programmatic support is enabling sustainable livelihoods in communities, despite the vulnerable environmental conditions in remote Char and Haor areas.

The program's service provisioning model made basic agricultural, health, savings, and WASH services readily available at people's doorstep through LSPs. The program continued to foster a savings attitude in communities through the VSLA platform, which strengthened community resilience to cope with shocks and stressors. Moreover, VSLAs created easy access to credit, which led to opportunities, especially for the poor community, to invest in a small business or to diversify income streams. DRR leaders also played an important role in raising community awareness on preparedness against natural calamities, which are most common in Char and Haor regions.

The SHOUHARDO III program has been a composite package and supports communities to raise demands collectively and access services/solutions locally. The LSPs, CLFs, and different thematic groups are practicing locally-led initiatives, activities, and efforts. They are making multisector support and services available to program communities.

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