



CARE Bangladesh

Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO) III Plus Activity

Report on Village Grading

“This document is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Contents are the responsibility of CARE Bangladesh and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States.”

Background

SHOUHARDO III Plus activity builds upon the achievements and success of SHOUHARDO III. In September 2022, CARE was awarded a two-year Cooperative Agreement No. 72038822CA00007 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to lead the SHOUHARDO III Plus Activity focused on increasing equitable access to income and nutritious foods for youth, women, and men by 2024. The program promoted enduring change for 168,521 poor and extremely poor households in eight vulnerable districts in Char and Haor regions, 23 Upazilas, and 115 unions of Bangladesh.

In FY24, CARE's SHOUHARDO III Plus activity conducted a Village Grading exercise in all its 941 villages. The activity was done whereby the communities assessed their performance and rated their villages vis-à-vis the program interventions that they received. An activity not new to the program as this was also done in SHOUHARDO's previous phase, the results of this exercise revealed findings which the program will utilize as it moves towards its sustainability pathway.

Objective of the Village grading assessment:

- Assess the progress of sustainable development of participants as well as community through SHOUHARDO III plus activity.
- Investigate areas that are still lagging behind or where progress is not satisfactory.
- These results will help the Village Development Committee (VDC) prepare an effective action plan for village development activities.
- These results will inspire the community to support development activities.

The process: How the village grading was conducted

- I. **Tools development:** The SHOUHARDO III Plus Activity, led by the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team, developed a tool based on key indicators grouped into six main categories. These included one general category focused on the capacity of Village Development Committees (VDCs), two result areas covering Agriculture and Livelihoods, and Health and Nutrition, and three cross-cutting areas addressing Resilience, Women's Empowerment, and Governance. The questions were designed to assess progress aligned with the program's core interventions. A total of 18 questions were included, with a cumulative score of 100 points (Annex I – Village Grading Instrument)
- II. **Staff orientation and capacity building:** The M&E team, along with program leadership, conducted orientation sessions on the tools for PNGO and CARE program staff via Zoom. This was a critical exercise for the program, as it was essential for staff at all levels, especially frontline workers, to be thoroughly familiar with the Village Grading process. The training emphasized several key points for conducting the village assessments i.e. a) Adhere to the principles of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) by engaging 25-30 respondents per village, b) Maintain transparency and consistency in the process across all villages, c) Ensure uncompromised data quality, d) Encourage critical analysis and data triangulation, and e) Utilize standard tools, processes, and steps throughout the assessment.
- III. **Assessment in the villages, May 2024:** Equipped with questionnaires and manual recording materials, the Field Facilitators (FFs) carried out the Village Grading exercise. Many of the FFs had prior experience with this process, which helped in its execution. Despite some contextual challenges, they received support from senior staff at CARE and PNGOs, which facilitated the sessions. The FFs

ensured that the sessions included diverse participation, engaging women, youth, and men from various demographics within the village. Participants were chosen based on their involvement in the project, familiarity with project interventions, and commitment to attending the entire session. Each assessment session was attended by 25 to 35 participants. Details on the number of villages graded per PNGO are provided in the table below.

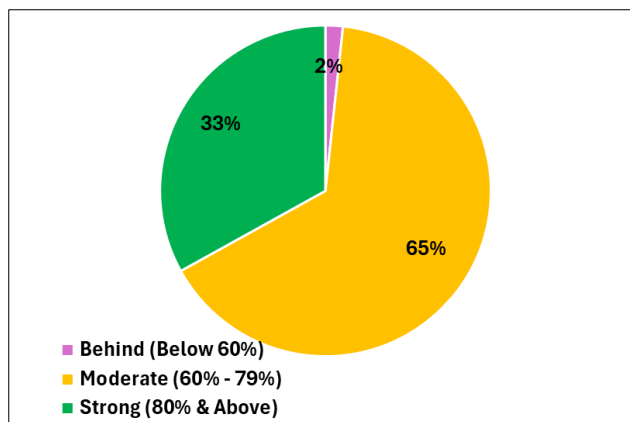
PNGOs	No. of villages covered
DAM	134
ESDO	70
MJSKS	188
POPI	229
SKS	320
Total	941

Table I. Number of villages covered by each PNGO

Synopsis of Village Grading:

According to the assessments, nearly one-third (33%) of the total villages were ranked as "Strong," while a small portion (2%) were categorized as "Behind" out of 941 villages." This indicates a significant positive impact of the program interventions on both participants and the broader community. Villages were classified based on their scores: those scoring 80% or above were labeled as "Strong," those scoring between 60% and 79% as "Moderate," and those scoring below 60% as "Behind." A glimpse of the major observation stated below-

Figure I: Overall village grading status.

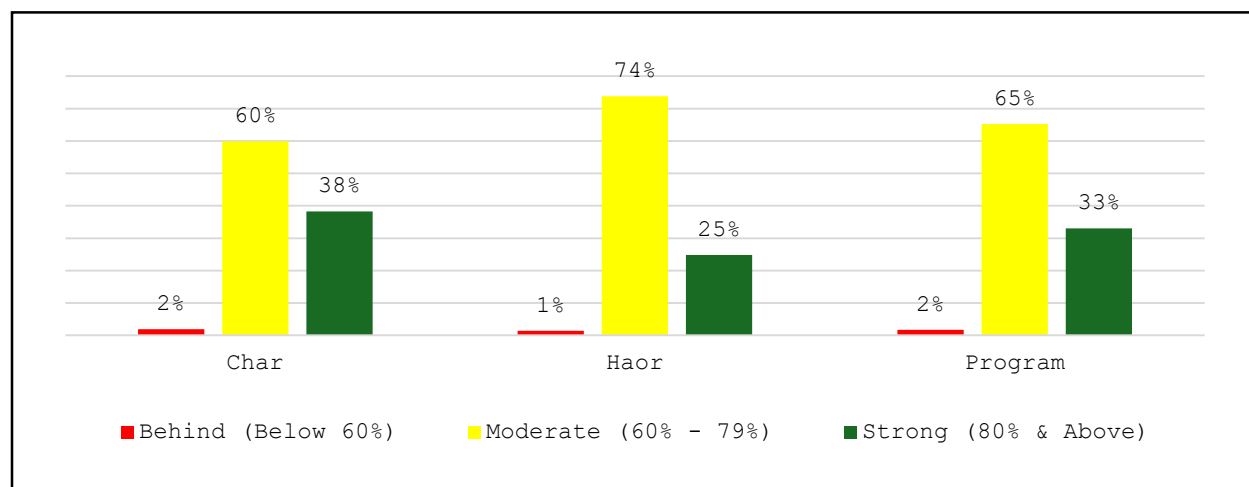


- Among the PNGOs, MJSKS had the highest proportion of strong villages, with 53% (100 out of 188) achieving this ranking.
- In the VDC capacity building category, the majority of villages were ranked as strong, with 83% (783 out of 941) achieving this status.
- For the Agriculture and Livelihood result area, 13% of villages were ranked as strong, while 53% were classified as moderate.
- The Health and Nutrition result area showed strong performance, with over half of the villages (54%, 507 out of 941) earning a strong ranking.
- In the crosscutting area of Women's Empowerment, 34% of villages (323 out of 941) were ranked as strong.
- The crosscutting area of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) had the highest proportion of strong villages, with 83% (785 out of 941) achieving this ranking.

Detailed Observation:

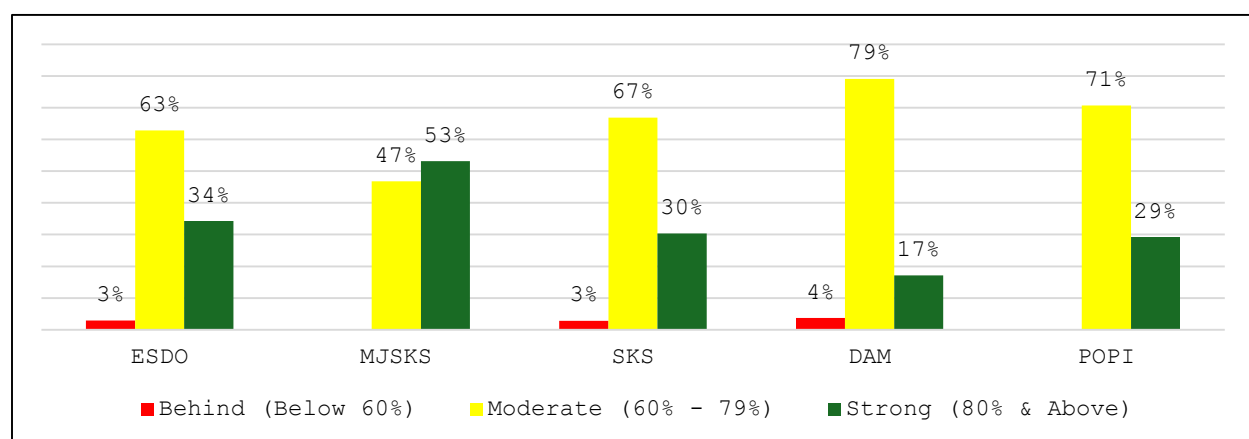
Village Grading by Region: The data indicated that a minimal number of villages (2%, or 16 out of 941) were ranked as "Behind." Most villages (65%, or 614 out of 941) were categorized as "Moderate," while a significant portion (33%, or 311 out of 941) were ranked as "Strong." Comparatively, the Char region performed slightly better than the Haor region, with 38% of villages in the Char region classified as "Strong," compared to 25% in the Haor region. The average village grading score was 76 in the Char region and 75 in the Haor region. However, there were more "Behind" villages in the Haor region compared to the Char region.

Figure 2: Village grading by region



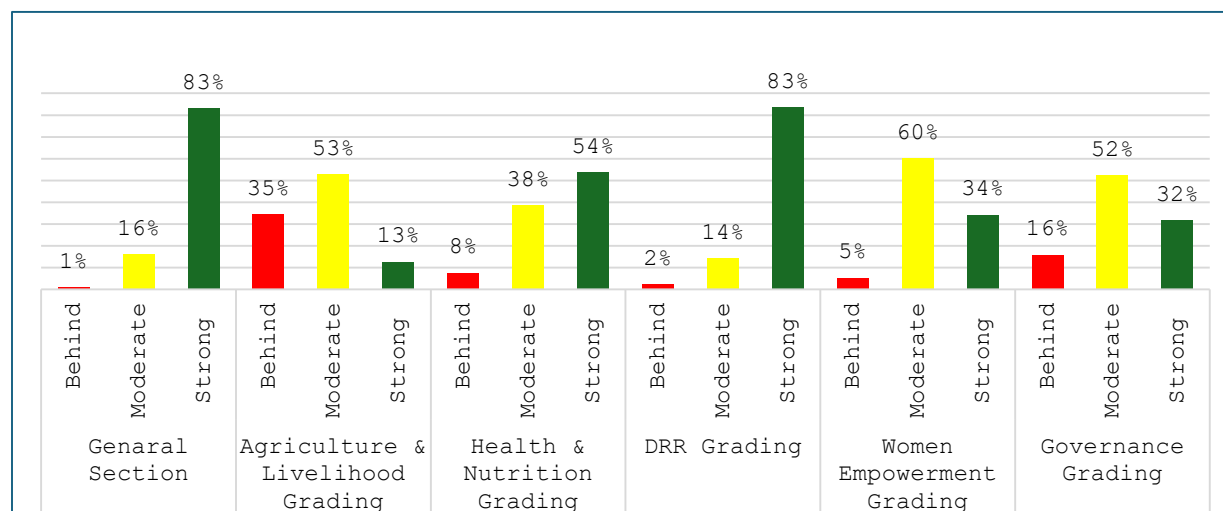
Village Grading by PNGOs: Among the PNGOs, MJSKS had the highest percentage of villages ranked as strong, at 53%, while DAM had the lowest, with only 17% of its villages classified as strong. DAM also had the highest proportion of villages graded as moderate (79%), whereas MJSKS had the lowest, with 47% of its villages falling into this category. Additionally, DAM recorded the highest percentage (4%) of behind villages across the program, while ESDO and SKS had the lowest, at 3%. Notably, both MJSKS and POPI had no villages categorized as behind.

Figure 3: PNGO wise village grading status



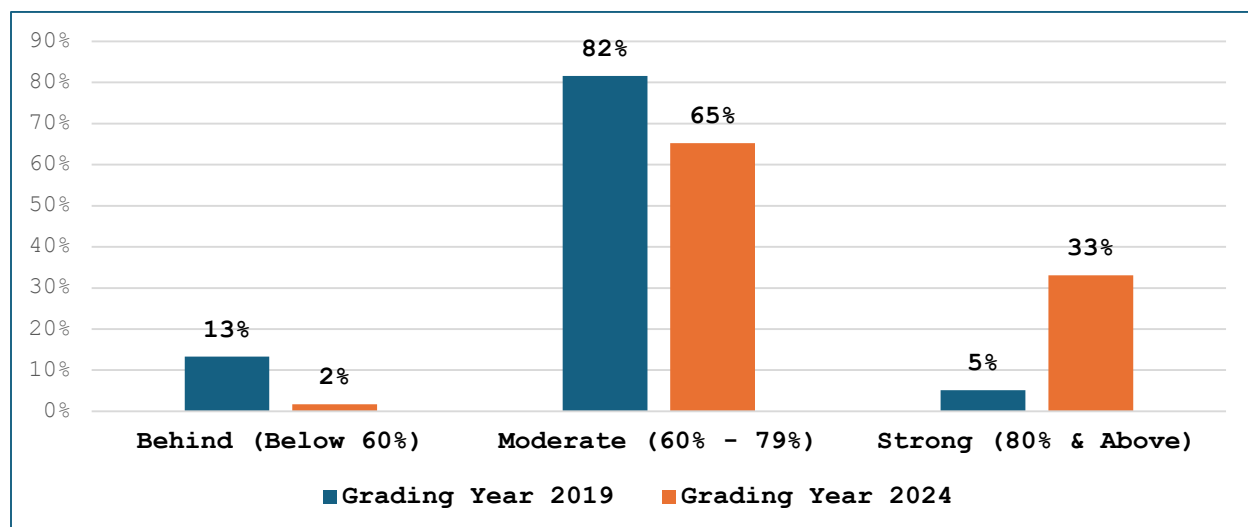
Village grading by Result Area: The data also reveal that VDC capacity (General section) and DRR area obtained better scores than other areas and Agriculture & Livelihood obtained the lowest score. The weaker performance in Agriculture & Livelihood appears to be linked to the underperformance of VSLA indicators, which contributed to the lag in this area. Above 50% of villages ranked strong in Health hygiene and Nutrition purpose. On the other hand, the minimum number of villages (13%) obtained strong in agriculture and livelihood area. Women's empowerment obtained the third better score where 34% village score in strong.

Figure 4: Area wise overall village grading status



Comparison of village grading status between 2024 and 2019: The SHOUHARDO program has consistently practiced village grading assessments across different phases. The most recent assessment before 2024 was conducted in 2019 during the SHOUHARDO III program. In 2024, SHOUHARDO III Plus revisited the same geographic locations for another round of village grading. The 2024 assessment revealed that 33% (311) of the villages were ranked as strong, 65% (614) as moderate, and 2% (16) as behind. These results indicate a marked improvement compared to the 2019 assessment, where only 5% of villages were graded as strong, 82% as moderate, and 13% as behind. The performance of 28% of villages improved to a strong ranking, and the proportion of behind villages dropped by 11%. This progress suggests that communities under SHOUHARDO III Plus have become more adept at sustaining their development initiatives.

Figure 5: Village grading comparison 2019 Vs 2024



Analysis and learning: the use of results

The Village Grading exercise is a key component of the intensive community engagement efforts of the SHOUHARDO III Plus Activity. This initiative allowed participants to reflect on and evaluate their progress in light of the program's interventions. The program is transitioning to a community-led approach, where participants define their own aspirations and goals. The program then helps them prioritize actions based on their strengths, preparing them to continue thriving independently with support from relevant systems after the program concludes. Specifically, the village grading results would be used for:

- The village grading exercise highlighted significant challenges concerning the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) activities. It was observed that formal banking connections, and financial literacy were areas where progress lagged. Approximately 25% of the villages reported a reduction in the number of VSLA groups compared to previous assessments. Furthermore, in 75% of the villages, VSLA members were not connected to formal banking, and in 33% of the villages, members had only a limited understanding of financial literacy. These findings suggest a need to develop future plans focused on enhancing VSLA activities, particularly in these areas.
- The Village Grading exercise revealed important insights into CARE and PNGOs about the actual conditions in the field. One key aspect that requires attention is the inclusion and support of members in the groups that will be formed as the program progresses. It is crucial to closely monitor farmers, young mothers, as well as adolescent girls and boys, to ensure they benefit from the program's interventions.
- The Field Facilitators, who are the program's frontline staff engaging with communities directly will receive further mentoring and coaching. The program will use this opportunity to regularly update them on the program's strategic directions for better understanding and carrying out of activities as far as their roles could contribute to the welfare of the communities.

Challenges: April and May are peak harvesting months in northern Bangladesh. During this period, program staff observed that communities were initially unable to participate in the Village Grading exercise, as many, especially the men, were fully occupied with harvesting their crops ahead of the

monsoon season. To address this, the program collaborated closely with community leaders to schedule the exercise at a more suitable time, ensuring the active participation of community members.

Conclusion: The village grading exercise is a critical initiative aimed at informing technical planning and strengthening program implementation. It has already demonstrated the program's efficiency and effectiveness through concrete evidence. Moreover, this exercise will play a key role in refining and integrating the existing implementation design and planning system. It focuses on identifying need-based support, determining the necessary skill sets for staff at various levels during the Cost Extension period, and fostering collaborative learning and adaptation. This approach seeks to establish the program as a flagship initiative in community development and ensuring sustainability across various thematic areas and objectives.