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THE LARGEST FOOD FOR PEACE PROJECT SHOUHARDO II STRENGTHENING HOUSEHOLD ABILITY TO RESPOND TO DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES



June 2015

This publication was prepared by CARE Bangladesh for the Food for Peace Office of the U.S. Agency for International Development Mission to Bangladesh. This report is also available on the CARE website at www.care.org.

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STRENGTHENING HOUSEHOLD ABILITY TO RESPOND TO DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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Submitted to

USAID Bangladesh

Award No

AID-FFP-A-10-00010

www.carebangladesh.org/shouhardoll/



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EKATA	Empowerment, Knowledge, and Transformative Action
GIS	Geographical Information Service
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
ITSH	Internal Transport Storage & Handling
kcal	kilocalories
NGO	Non-government Organization
PACC	Project Advisory and Coordination Committee
PEP	Poor and Extremely Poor
SHOUHARDO	Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee

I.0 PROJECT OVERVIEW

SHOUHARDO II (Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities) is the largest Food for Peace project in the world and is a model for reducing child malnutrition while contributing to greater livelihood security and women's empowerment. Funded by USAID as a Food for Peace Title II program, and with additional funding from the Government of Bangladesh and CARE USA, the project's reach is huge with over 1.8 million beneficiaries.

Focused on the poor regardless of their geographic inaccessibility, SHOUHARDO II places empowerment of the poor and extremely poor at its foundation. Within its program areas of agriculture & livelihoods; health, hygiene, and nutrition; and disaster & and climate risk management, the project delivers an integrated set of services—a holistic framework with an emphasis on women's empowerment & gender issues and good governance.

To illustrate the SHOUHARDO II focus, stunting (low height for age) is a critical indicator of nutritional well being, and in Bangladesh 36% of children are stunted. Among the project's beneficiaries, that figure is a shocking 61.7%. An external end-line evaluation showed that project interventions had reduced that number to 48.8%—that is over 73,000 children who are no longer suffering from this malady. Similar gains across the spectrum of food security indicators were delivered in all regions.



GOAL

Transform the lives of 370,000 poor and extremely poor households in 11 of the poorest and most marginalized districts in Bangladesh by reducing their vulnerability to food insecurity.

I.1 THE NEED FOR SHOUHARDO

Although Bangladesh has made significant progress towards the reduction of poverty, it is still one of the poorest and most densely populated countries in the world—over 157 million people in an area the size of the state of Iowa—with 31.5% living below the poverty line. This is around 50 million of the world's poor.

The three major domains of food security—availability, access, and utilization—are constrained by health, economic, social, and governance factors, and all are exacerbated by frequent and intense natural disasters. The greatest concentration of poor is in rural areas, and they earn a living as farmers or as wage laborers and service providers. The vast majority are connected to agriculture and its sub sectors. Rural poverty and food security are the critical development challenges as the extremely poor consume less than 1,805 kilocalories per day (versus 2,500 to 3,000 kcal for an adult male), they lack dietary diversity, and their intake of animal protein is only 4.3%. The low birth weight rate is 36% in Bangladesh, and the mortality rate of very low birth weight babies is very high.

This is due to undernutrition during pregnancy and the chronic energy deficiency that prevails in more than 50% of women. The situation further worsens because Community-based Integrated Management of

Childhood Illness and Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition interventions are not functioning to manage diarrhea, pneumonia, and malnutrition at the community level. Only 21% of children aged 6-23 months are fed appropriately according to recommended infant and young child feeding practices. Childhood undernutrition negatively affects cognitive development, increases infection risk, limits physical capacity and childbearing, reduces adult economic productivity, and increases mortality risk.

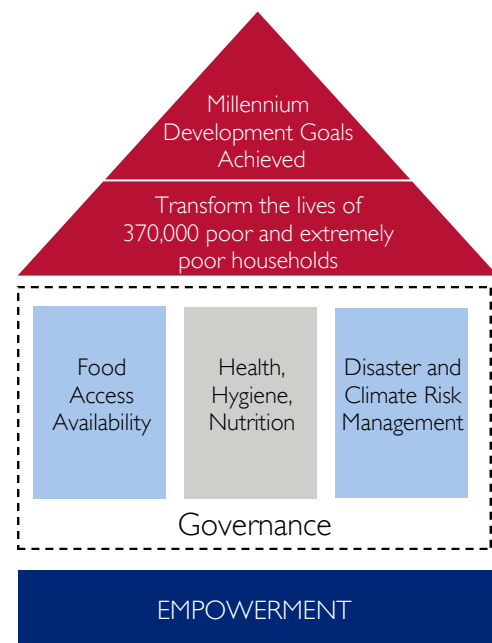
Traditional gender and social norms in Bangladesh affect women's economic inclusion and exclude women and youth from decision-making. Even among employed women, only one-third report being able to decide alone how to use their earnings—and only 13% of women aged 15-49 years are employed. Women are also less likely to participate in decision-making about health, childcare, asset purchases, and mobility. Less than 3% of women own land, and while women's labor remains essential for agriculture, patriarchal perceptions rarely acknowledge their importance as farmers.

1.2 CONCEPTUAL BASIS

It is within this context that USAID called for a major food security project.

Food security is both physical and economic access to a reliable source of food needed for a healthy and active life. This means that nutrition, agriculture, non-farm income, access to land, pre-natal care, access to markets, child vaccination, basic sanitation, savings, small holder farms, micro-nutrients, dissemination of knowledge, food rations, delivery of government services, infrastructure, gender roles, and disaster mitigation are all involved and interconnected.

A layering of interventions in combination is needed. This is a holistic program of support and development rather than the more common delivery of farmer training in this household, nutrition in another, and income generation in a third.



The beneficiaries are identified through a participatory process in a village meeting and then begin a sustained relationship with the project. There is coaching and training on a number of topics, distribution of food rations and of productive assets, linkages to government and private sector providers of goods and services, group sessions on a range of nutrition and sanitation issues, and much more. The idea is to provide a "big push" at a local level over an extended period of time in the hope of unlocking a poverty trap with longer term development objectives integrated into the near term support activities.

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

SHOUHARDO began in 2004 and registered excellent results. SHOUHARDO II is the follow on, and the largest Food for Peace project in the world. Together, they have reached over 3.7 million beneficiaries in 777,309 households in 3,787 villages.

The projects are funded by USAID; the Local Government Division of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development, and Cooperatives of the Government of Bangladesh; and CARE USA. US funding is via the Food for Peace Title II program, and monetization plays a significant role: a combined 351,922 metric tons. About 80% of the shipped commodities are purchased by the government of Bangladesh for distribution through existing safety net programs and the remainder is distributed as direct food aid to pregnant and lactating women.

90% of project activities are implemented by local partners. The partners are Bangladeshi NGOs and each has a long record of high quality project implementation and were selected for this project via a rigorous and competitive process. Each has strong acceptance and a substantial long-term presence in the target districts.

In the communities, Village Development Committees (VDC) are formed from community members representing a cross section of the community and with 50/50 male/female membership. The members receive leadership and planning training, and they identify community needs, develop action plans, advocate for improved government services, and fill a dual role of assisting in implementation as well as forming a sustainable mechanism for continued improvements. In this work, they are supported by volunteers recruited from the community.

More than 10,500 volunteers were recruited in the follow on SHOUHARDO II project alone to assist in activities, coach beneficiaries, promote project learning broadly, and continue activities after the end of the project. Each village had volunteers in health and agriculture, and most villages also had volunteers focused on women's empowerment and disaster response.

There is also a close working relationship with the Government of Bangladesh. The Project Advisory and Coordinating Committee is made up of representatives of 14 ministries. The PACC meets at the national level and at local and intermediate levels not only to provide oversight but also to play a practical facilitating role. Over 430 meetings of the PACCs were held during SHOUHARDO II.

2.1 PROJECT RESOURCES

SHOUHARDO II is funded through 202(e), internal transport storage & handling (ITSH), monetization proceeds, direct funding by the Government of Bangladesh, and CARE USA for a budget of \$129 million over five years.

About 20% of the commodities are distributed as direct food aid, and 80% are purchased by the Government of Bangladesh for distribution through existing systems. The price the government pays the project is 85% of

the bill of lading value. The commodities—wheat, yellow split peas, and fortified vegetable oil—were selected in large part because their arrival into the local market would not be disruptive. Domestic production of wheat is not sufficient for the local market, and the quantity of oil and peas was relatively low.

2.2 PROJECT ACTIVITIES

2.2.1 Enhancing and protecting food security

The poor grow food to survive, and most have no land of their own. Homestead gardens and improved farming methods are areas of focus. Non-farm income generating opportunities are also a key program area along with improved access to markets, savings mechanisms, and access to credit.

SHOUHARDO II trained 216,683 people in various agricultural sectors, 153,317 in non-farm income generation activities, and helped establish 905 self-help savings groups.



SHOUHARDO II beneficiaries working in their cage aquaculture pond. Asafuzzaman/CARE Bangladesh.

2.2.2 Improving health, hygiene, and nutrition

Due to scarcity of cultivable land, increases in population, and high levels of poverty, food aid continues to be an important resource for poor families in Bangladesh. Over 152,000 pregnant and lactating mothers received supplementary food rations of 1300 kcal each.

Prenatal care is weak, and stunting, wasting, and under weight are common among children. SHOUHARDO II conducted over 175,000 courtyard sessions for pregnant and lactating mothers, over 148,000 sessions on growth monitoring practices, over a thousand workshops for government service providers, and more than two million household visits to pregnant and lactating women.



A mother receives information about mother and child nutrition. CARE Bangladesh.

2.2.3 Empowering women and girls

Increasing the agency of women and adolescent girls is a key objective of the project, and EKATA (Empowerment, Knowledge, and Transformative Action) is the model. In Bangla, *ekata* means together—in this case groups of about 35 women and adolescent girls. The model uses a participatory process to enable

groups to identify root causes of gender-based issues and find solutions to these problems. They prepare and implement action plans using their own resources.

Over 40,000 women have used training in leadership, group dynamics, and legal rights to complete gender analyses in their communities and work on VDCs to contribute to local development.



An EKATA group meets to discuss gender issues in their village. Asafuzzaman/CARE Bangladesh.

2.2.4 Improving responsiveness of services

VDCs are the key vehicle for improving conditions in the project area. Mobilized to identify local problems and the local resources to address them, the committees are inclusive and participatory. Through these, the poor engage and influence higher levels of government and gain access to public services which are often weak at the local level.

With project support, each of the project's 1,573 villages has formed a VDC, and each has produced a community action plan to focus resources on local improvements. The VDCs are active in reaching out to local government, and the project has done extensive work with a range of government offices and agencies to help them work with the VDCs to better serve constituents. Over 9,000 PACC members have visited the VDCs, over 3,000 government employees have been trained, and the project has sponsored 52 'Service Fairs' in places where communication infrastructure is poor and government services are hard to access.

2.2.5 Facilitating disaster management & climate change adaptation

Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to adverse weather with floods, shifting rivers, and cyclones regularly occurring in the country. SHOUHARDO II maintains an extensive network of warehouses and logistics services to be flexible and responsive in emergencies. USAID and other donors often rely on SHOUHARDO II for rapid response, and the project's core element of fostering preparedness ameliorates the effects of seasonal floods in project areas.

Over 21,000 people in 1,525 communities have been trained in disaster preparedness and climate change, and greatly enhanced early warning and response systems have been put in place in each community. Risk & resource maps and disaster management plans are also in place at 172 intermediate level government offices.



Disaster volunteers assisting flood affected people to shelters. Asafuzzaman/CARE Bangladesh.

2.3 PROJECT COVERAGE

2.3.1 Poor and Extremely Poor

This project serves the poor. Among these are the "extremely poor"—those without even a small piece of land on which to grow food. Among these poor & extremely poor, the typical household has adequate food only 6.8 months per year and the per capita cash income is about \$96 per year. Over 35% of children under two are under weight and over 58% have a stunted weight to height ratio. Only 11% of children 6-23 months receive an acceptable diet other than breast milk. In the areas in which SHOUHARDO II works, the northern and mid *char* areas and the northeastern *haor*; an estimated 55% of the population are classified as poor with high malnutrition.



SHOUHARDO II beneficiaries receive a cool box for their newly formed business of selling fish to wholesalers. Adnan Kabin/CARE Bangladesh.

About 44% of Bangladeshi girls 15-19 years of age are married. Out of these, 49% suffer from anemia, but as a result of traditional restrictions on women's mobility, about 42% of these cannot go to the hospital or health centers alone. In these areas about a third of girls 15-19 years of age have begun childbearing.

2.3.2 Geography

The program implementation areas in north *char*; mid-*char*; *haor*; and the south-west coast are diverse. The *char* and *haor* areas experience frequent and damaging floods due to monsoon season rains, and the coastal belt is prone to cyclones and the adverse effects of salination. The poor are most vulnerable because they live in the least desirable (i.e., most dangerous) tracts of land.

Flood prone, crop production is impeded in the *haor* region, and farmers have to rely on a single crop, a rice called '*boro*'. If the *boro* crop fails, the households become food insecure. In the *chars* (large sand banks), livelihoods are affected by frequent flooding and river erosion which result in the loss of assets (both crops and livestock), a scarcity of clean water, and shortages of fodder. In the coastal areas, salt water penetrates inland and lowers agricultural productivity and increases food insecurity; the monsoon depressions, tidal surges, and tropical cyclones in the Bay of Bengal are frequent and can be large.

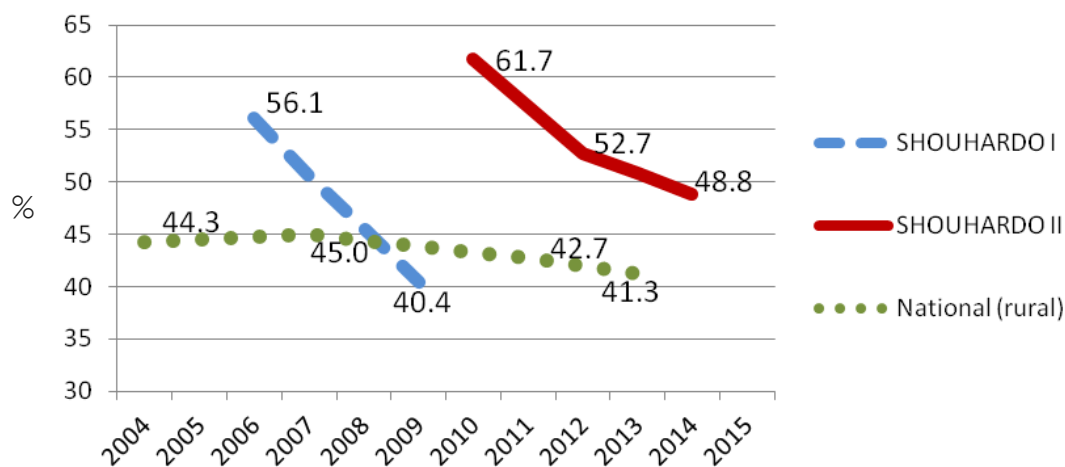
In the rural areas of these diverse regions, this project works in 1,573 villages of about 150-300 households each to reach 370,000 households—about 1.8 million people.

3.0 RESULTS TO DATE

By any measure, this project has delivered tremendous improvements in the lives of poor Bangladeshis

- Increased average household monthly income by 79%
- Increased the number of households growing vegetables by 281%
- Increased the adoption of improved technologies by field crop producers by 120%
- Increased market access by 39%
- Increased average household dietary diversity score by 81%
- Increased access to improved drinking water sources by 30%
- Increased access to improved sanitation facilities by 160%
- Reduced stunting in children under five years of age by 21%
- Reduced prevalence of underweight children under five years of age by 16%
- Increased women's earning of cash income/control over economic resources by 248%
- Increased women's freedom of movement by 30%
- Reduced prevalence of domestic violence by 74%

Change in the prevalence of stunting among children under five



Sources: SHOUHARDO I data: Smith et al. (2012). SHOUHARDO II data: TANGO, International (2015). National (rural) prevalence: NIPOORT et al. (2005, 2009, 2013) and Shahin et al. (2014).

- Reached 371,897 poor and extremely poor households in 1,573 villages
- Mobilized over 10,500 volunteers
- Delivered 34,221 metric tons of food to 154,317 pregnant women and lactating mothers
- Reached over 144,144 children under two with nutrition programs
- Monetized 169,840 metric tons of US agricultural commodities
- Fostered 513 women's self help groups
- Constructed or repaired 6,650 infrastructure schemes
- Assisted 1,537 communities with disaster early warning and response systems
- Trained 20,919 people in disaster preparedness

4.0 BEST PRACTICES

4.1 HOLISTIC APPROACH

SHOUHARDO II delivers a wide range of services, trainings, and other interventions: distribution of food rations, cash for work, infrastructure repair, women's empowerment coaching, farming training & agricultural inputs, non-farm income generation skills training & productive assets, savings promotion & financial literacy, nutritional supplements, linkages to health care service providers, support of vaccination programs, training on nutrition & sanitation, training for agricultural extension workers, training for community health workers, mobilization of local resources, inclusive local planning, early storm & flood warning, preparation of community & regional disaster response plans, and more.

This comprehensive approach in itself is the chief best practice of SHOUHARDO II.

As confirmed in a recent development economics research paper, development programs that address a spectrum of needs and, importantly, sustain the level of involvement over time while focusing on individual, household, and community level action achieve more and have results that are more sustainable (Banerjee, Duflo, et al, 2015).

When delivered as an integrated whole, sustained interventions facilitate transformative learning. The participants internalize new ways of looking at their life circumstances, options, and their ability to influence their futures. Decision making takes on a longer term perspective, and results are more likely to continue after the project ends.

4.2 EXPERIENCED LOCAL STAFF

CARE Bangladesh was fortunate to have had a long presence in the country at the start of this project and thus had a cadre of experienced local staff. This made a short learning curve possible to ensure that the thousands of decisions made as implementation moved forward were applicable to the specific conditions of the time and place.

Host country staff in senior management positions made the project credible to counterparts and partners and eased countless obstacles in a difficult operational environment.

4.3 LOCAL NGO IMPLEMENTERS

In support of USAID Forward Local Solutions, CARE Bangladesh implements SHOUHARDO II through 16 partner NGOs. These partners are all Bangladeshi registered NGOs, and each has an established presence and strong reputation in the target districts. This reduces costs, increases project credibility, and strengthens the country's development capacity.

There are also close working relationships with a number of local and regional technical partners such as the International Rice Research Institute's Cereal System Initiative for South Asia, the Chittagong Veterinary and

Animal Science University, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, World Fish, the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Local Government Engineering Department and numerous private sector partners.

4.4 GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION

The most important partner is the government of Bangladesh. There is a close working relationship with the government through a Project Advisory and Coordinating Committee made up of representatives of 14 ministries. The PACC provides not just oversight but also plays practical facilitating roles at multiple levels as SHOUHARDO II implements its activities throughout the country.

The government's long-term development strategy focuses on poverty & income, education, nutrition, health, and women's empowerment, and these priorities are reflected in the project design. The GoB directly funds 10% of the project's operating budget.

4.5 TARGETING TO OPTIMIZE THE USE OF SCARCE RESOURCES

There are many poor people in Bangladesh but SHOUHARDO II targeted only the very poor. Identifying the poorest people in a poor area requires effort up front but is well worth the cost. The process included interviews with community leaders, the GoB, and local NGOs before moving on to participatory rapid assessments, on-site focus group discussions, quantitative well-being analyses, and house-to-house surveys. This process creates a 'vulnerability map' and targets specific villages in an area. Although all project interventions are delivered in all communities, this process identifies priorities for initial activity sequencing.

The project recognizes 'contextual' poverty—the poorest in one area are not necessarily at the same level as the poor in another area—so slightly different criteria are used in each region. To be sure, all participants are very poor, but this project seeks out the poorest of the poor in each place.

4.6 COMMUNITY AS AN ACTIVE PARTNER

It is critically important that the community enter into a partnership with the project, and the implementation of SHOUHARDO II activities always starts with a community-led activity to build solidarity and—as is frankly and clearly explained to the potential participants—to show commitment on their part, proof that the community will work with the project and contribute to the improvement process.

5.0 LESSONS LEARNED

SHOUHARDO II leadership takes an unbiased, data driven view of its own performance and recognizes that no project design is perfect. Here are a few things that could have been done differently.

5.1 STRONGER EMPHASIS ON LIFE SKILLS

The holistic approach mentioned earlier rests on a transformation of the participants' perceptions of themselves and their roles in society, a transformation without which none of the trainings or interventions would be fully adopted. In empowerment efforts this is known as individual agency, and "recent research in Ethiopia has pointed to low self-esteem, low aspirations, and a fatalistic view among the poor as intrinsically linked with their inability to take action to improve their material well being" (Frankenberger, 2014).

In SHOUHARDO II, the women's empowerment program focused on groups of women in selected villages but reached only about 10% of adult women in the project areas. Data shows better project results in those areas, and it is clear that all participants need life skills training.

5.2 DEEPER RESEARCH INTO ATTITUDES & KNOWLEDGE

Project training materials were modified after the first few uses. Often the reason was that the technical trainers who developed the material had over-estimated the participants' knowledge and understanding of basic points. For example, there is quite a lack of knowledge at the household level about good sanitation and hygiene practices: many people do not understand the importance of washing one's hands or even clipping finger nails. Some quick, basic research at the outset (a survey on knowledge and behavior) would have contributed to better training earlier.

5.3 INSTITUTIONALIZE THE VDCs & VOLUNTEERS

Community mobilization, community action, and community resources have been key to the project's success. For the most part, the village development committees and volunteers in health, agriculture, women's empowerment, and disaster relief were oriented toward project implementation. By the project mid-point, however, it had become clear that these would be the vehicles for sustaining the systemic improvements initiated by SHOUHARDO II, and while the continued work of many volunteers and VDCs has been impressive, more could have been done earlier to bring the volunteers and village committees into local government and service delivery processes—not the formal registration of these as entities, but a more intentional effort at sustained citizen engagement as a mechanism for continued improvement.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The knowledge management approach taken by SHOUHARDO II is linked to CARE Bangladesh's overarching strategy which places learning at the center of the organization's operations. Knowledge management and learning are integral parts of the organization's daily work, problem-solving approaches, and efforts to achieve maximum impact in the most vulnerable populations in each targeted community. Critical to this is an effective and active monitoring and evaluation system which gathers huge amounts of data and processes it into usable information to enable the mid-course adjustments and flexibility mentioned earlier.

This document is part of that focus. In our mission to help the poorest and most vulnerable improve their lives, we hope this short study will prompt further inquiry by projects around the world into the application of proven concepts and best practices.

Acknowledgements

These results, best practices, and lessons for practitioners are the result of strong project leadership over ten years from Faheem Khan, Marc Nosbach, and Monzu Morshed and due to the diligent efforts of several hundred people at CARE Bangladesh.

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Additional Information

Project website	www.carebangladesh.org/shouhardoll
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