

## BRIEF ON THE SHOUHARDO PROGRAM (2004 – 2022) & SHOUHARDO III PLUS

### INTRODUCTION:

**SHOUHARDO (Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities)** was a flagship initiative aimed at enhancing food and livelihood security in Bangladesh funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Spearheaded by CARE Bangladesh in collaboration with the Local Government Division (LGD) of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, the program was launched in 2004 and encompassed three distinct phases concluding in 2022. Each phase was originally designed to last five years, with extensions granted to ensure the successful implementation of project objectives. Notably, the first phase received a one-year extension while the third phase was extended by two years with all stakeholders reaching a consensus on the necessity for additional time to achieve the intended outcomes. This collaborative effort significantly contributed to improving the resilience and capabilities of vulnerable households throughout the targeted areas in Bangladesh.

### GOAL:

The program aimed to reduce chronic food insecurity and poverty among vulnerable and marginalized communities in rural Bangladesh particularly in the Char, Haor and Coastal regions.

### ESTIMATED PROGRAM COST: \$ 375 MILLION US DOLLAR

The SHOUHARDO program received the following financial allocations across three phases:

1. **First Phase (2004-2010)** : Approximately \$128 million USD
2. **Second Phase (2010-2015)** : Approximately \$132 million USD
3. **Third Phase (2015-2022)** : Approximately \$115 million USD

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) contributed 10% of the total funding provided by USAID. Additionally, the GoB allocated direct funds to the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) under the SHOUHARDO Program to maintain and repair infrastructure previously constructed with USAID funds which are included in the overall budget figures.

### OPERATIONAL AREA AND SELECTION OF BENEFICIARIES:

The program focused on addressing poverty in the Char, Haor and Coastal regions of Bangladesh using key metrics from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). This initiative was implemented in collaboration with the World Bank (WB) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Beneficiaries were selected through a well-being analysis supported by communities, Union Parishads (UPs) and the relevant Upazila Administrations.

The SHOUHARDO Program operated across 20 districts in Bangladesh including Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Mymensingh, Kishoreganj, Netrakona, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Tangail, Bogura, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Nilphamari, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat, Pabna, Sirajganj, Hobiganj, and Sunamganj.

### OPERATIONAL STRATEGY:

The program was implemented in collaboration with local NGOs operating in designated areas. Oversight and coordination were provided by the Program Advisory and Coordination Committee (PACC) which included representatives from 13 relevant ministries and was chaired by the Secretary of the Local Government Division (LGD). Similar structures were established at divisional, district and upazila levels mirroring the PACC's functions. These committees were led

by the Divisional Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and Upazila Nirbahi Officer working closely with officials from the Nation Building Departments (NBD) at each administrative level. The program also established partnerships with private sector entities and research institutions.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS :**

Throughout its implementation, the SHOUHARDO Program achieved significant milestones as reflected in evaluations conducted at the conclusion of each phase. Key outcomes include:

- Improved food security and nutrition levels among targeted communities.
- Increased income and livelihood opportunities for vulnerable populations.
- Empowerment of women across program areas.
- Strengthened community mechanisms for more effective government service delivery.
- Substantial reductions in stunting and wasting rates among children under five.
- Infrastructure advancements, including homestead elevations, the construction of 21 Union Parishad complexes, mound protection walls in the Haor region to prevent flood erosion, and the development of multi-purpose structures serving as both schools and flood shelters, safeguarding lives, properties, and livestock during flood events.

## **CHALLENGES:**

The program faced several challenges, including:

- Limited opportunities for introducing a diverse array of livelihood options.
- Ongoing difficulties in optimizing crop production and ensuring efficient irrigation in remote rural areas.
- Persistent issues with riverbank erosion, unexpected flash floods, and frequent waterlogging of agricultural lands.
- Reduced engagement and active participation from younger demographics, particularly adolescents and youth in the program's initiatives.
- In the final years of the program, the emergence of COVID-19 and a rise in global food commodity prices adversely affected the earning potential of households in rural Bangladesh.

## **SHOUHARDO III PLUS ACTIVITY (OCTOBER 2022 – JANUARY 2025):**

To sustain the momentum and long-term success of the SHOUHARDO Program, CARE Bangladesh has launched a two-year initiative titled SHOUHARDO III Plus. This project is set to run from October 2022 to September 2024 with an estimated budget of \$8.5 million provided by USAID.

A primary objective of SHOUHARDO III Plus is to improve the nutritional well-being of children under five, pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls. The initiative employs a comprehensive approach that integrates private sector collaboration and government service delivery, aiming to enhance food and nutrition security in a gender-equitable and resilient manner for households in Bangladesh's Char and Haor regions by 2024. A key focus is on strengthening Local Service Providers (LSPs) to ensure continued access to essential services beyond the program's duration. Throughout the project adaptive management techniques will be employed to address emerging challenges and optimize strategies including fostering entrepreneurship among LSPs and enhancing connections between Village Development Committees (VDCs) and service providers.

As a result of successful advocacy efforts, Bangladesh Bank was convinced in 2023 to recognize Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and to encourage commercial banks to offer banking services to VSLA members, including account openings for as little as 10 Taka and improved access to loans.

To achieve its final-year objectives and ensure the sustainability of its impacts, SHOUHARDO III Plus has received a four-month extension without additional costs, extending the project’s timeline from its original end date of September 30, 2024, to January 31, 2025. This extension will enable the program to finalize pending activities and secure long-term achievements.

Specifically, this extension will allow the initiative to:

1. Build upon recent advocacy successes related to financial inclusion, providing additional time to strengthen connections between VSLAs and commercial banks, thereby enhancing financial access and inclusion.
2. Fortify the network of Local Service Providers (LSPs) by focusing on strategies to boost their capacity, collaboration, and effectiveness in delivering community services and ensuring sustained impact.
3. Support the activities of the Village Development Committee (VDC) in establishing effective communication and coordination with relevant authorities to address community needs.

**MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF SHOUHARDO III PLUS AS OF DATE:**

The key achievements of SHOUHARDO III Plus as of date are as follows;

- Developed approximately 2,300 Local Service Providers (LSPs) to deliver services in hard-to-reach areas with limited public services.
- Successfully advocated for financial inclusion for underprivileged unbanked communities by engaging with the Central Bank of Bangladesh and commercial banks resulting in the mobilization of USD 109,000 for Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) members.
- Facilitated the establishment of 940 Girls' Forums at the village level to raise awareness about the negative consequences of child marriage and to promote prevention efforts.
- Supported the formation of 941 Village Development Committees (VDCs) to negotiate access to public and private services for impoverished and extremely poor communities.
- Guided LSPs in forming 115 Business Networks aimed at accelerating the growth of individual LSPs and enhancing their business capabilities.
- Maintained operations for approximately 2,700 VSLAs with around 50,000 members managed by approximately 500 Sanchay Sathis/Village Agents.

**CONCLUSION:**

The SHOUHARDO III Plus program adopts a holistic approach to advance sustainable food security, enhance livelihoods, empower women and increase community awareness. Through the effective implementation of these initiatives, we anticipate significant improvements in the well-being of our target populations particularly among the Poor and Extremely Poor (PEP) in our operational regions.

The extension enables the program to successfully complete essential activities and reinforce the sustainability of its long-term outcomes. The additional time will facilitate a comprehensive and participatory implementation of the close-out plan which includes finalizing engagements with local communities, government entities and private sector partners. We will also organize a concluding event involving representatives from the Government of Bangladesh in collaboration with USAID. This process will adhere to a bottom-up approach, ensuring inclusive participation from the community level to the national level. In parallel, SHOUHARDO III Plus has devised a detailed documentation plan in collaboration with CARE’s country office and headquarters to capture and share valuable insights and lessons learned from the program

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