CARE Bangladesh's SHOUHARDO is one of the world's biggest food security programs funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which implements multi-sectoral purposes to address underlying issues of food security and nutrition in Northern Bangladesh. With the third phase running, the program is thriving to make an impactful change in people's lives. One of the compelling results that participants reported on is the increase in income among farmers – some of them, by tenfold. This edition highlights one of the main reasons behind this success – the Farmers’ Field Business School (FFBS) model. It also covers SHOUHARDO III’s role in accessing khas lands for the poor and extreme poor (PEP) people in the targeted areas, a brief glimpse of events as six of the program participants receive Joyeeta award and SHOUHARDO III’s contribution to support the refugees who fled from Rakhine state in Myanmar.
SHOUHARDO III always strives to find ways in achieving its goal for the food security and resilience of people living in the char and haor areas of Northern Bangladesh. This is one of the reasons why the program adopted the multi-sectoral approach to ensure the long-term impact on the lives and livelihoods of the people in these areas, especially women. Among its major models, FFBS, is one where male and female farmers get space to learn and share experiences. It supports them by imparting knowledge through training, providing initial capital as startup of their chosen livelihoods and linking them to markets – all of these aim to increase their income and productivity.

Once again we sincerely acknowledge the generous support of our communities, partners and field offices for working tirelessly. Hope you enjoy reading and should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to forward these to us.

Walter Mwasaa

Message from the Chief of Party

SHOUHARDO III conducted Value Chain Analysis and market assessment that led to introduction of new crops (chili, maize and pumpkin) and livestock (ducks and goats) in its target areas. In order to properly train farmers and other on-farm producers, the program utilized the FFBS model.

The FFBS is a hands-on, learning-by-doing model through which groups of farmers meet regularly during the course of cropping or livestock production cycle to learn about agricultural techniques and technologies. They also discuss how to improve existing traditional farming practices to achieve optimum results. They then demonstrate the use of these in (actual) plots.

In the FFBS, farmers are able to discuss challenges and proposed solutions. This forum is also used as a platform to learn about - who and where to buy inputs from, and where and how often products sell. In addition to technical topics on on-farm and off-farm production and market linkages, the FFBS also covers sessions on -

- nutrition (food groups and home gardening, cooking and feeding demonstrations, exclusive breastfeeding);
- addressing social norms that affect women’s participation in productive activities (access to land and inputs, the cost of violence against women, addressing workload challenges in the households, household decision making and income control);
- getting farmers to lobby for services from government (Union Parishad, Department of Agriculture Extension, Department of Livestock and Health); and
- risk management and disaster preparedness approach to farming.

Moreover, farmers receive basic life skills to strengthen their capacity (e.g. business-related decision making, communication and financial literacy).

A community agriculture volunteer facilitates one of the FFBS sessions in Jamalpur.

FFBS in a nutshell
SHOUHARDO III works on reducing food insecurity and graduation of participants to a sustainable situation which will ensure their economic stability. The FFBS model is designed in a way so that farmers will be trained to organize themselves in the whole cropping and livestock production cycle. Community Agriculture Volunteers (CAV) provide support in preparing the session plans and coordinate the overall learning process of farmers with the help as well of market actors including both private and public. The Village Development Committee (VDC) also provides assistance in selecting participants, distributing inputs and monitoring, and building linkage with the Union Parishads and other union level government service providers.

**FFBS implementation steps:**

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Market linkage for the Poor and Extreme Poor (PEP)

After analyzing markets and value chains, SHOUHARDO III program sets interventions to connect farmers with the markets and motivates PEP farmers to cultivate products considering the market demands. The main constraints of the PEP participating in value chains are - (a) lack of access to quality inputs (seeds) and (b) lack of knowledge on improved production technologies. For market linkage, the major activities of the program are conducting value chain analysis, capacity building of facilitators, develop and link social service providers to participants, develop linkage between input sellers and buyers with participants, establish collection points and facilitate entrepreneurs' participation in market fairs. Through the FFBS, SHOUHARDO III focuses on building farmers' understanding of markets including quality and volume requirements for higher value markets and calculating of gross margins. This enables farmers to target markets and buyers outside their community. The program strengthens market linkages by communicating with and facilitating marketing committee formation and market visits. The program works with companies like BRAC Seed, Lal Teer Seed, Syngenta and ACI seed to help the PEP to purchase quality inputs from locally accessible markets.

To further support the participants in selling their produce in bulk, SHOUHARDO III is collaborating with industrial buyers such as CP Bangladesh and Aftab Bahumukhi Farms Ltd. who buy maize from farmers. This reduces farmers' post-harvest challenges, that include waiting time to identify buyers which often deteriorates the quality of crops.
Landless PEP families were supported to obtain Government’s *khas* land

*Khas* land is defined as government-owned fallow land, where “nobody has property rights.” This huge, persistent issue leads to landlessness and other consequential problems. Faced with extremely complicated process and other challenges, SHOUHARDO III provides support to help the program’s PEP participants have access to pieces of lands.

Considering cultivable land as a fundamental asset for agricultural production, the program is facilitating advocacy with the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) for allocation of *khas* land among the landless families in the program areas. With this end in view, a two-day training on *khas* land settlement process was organized separately at *char* and *haor* region in September and October 2017, respectively. In the first day of the training, the discussion was held to tackle sources of *khas* land, types of *khas* land, application process and eligibility criteria of getting *khas* land. The second day was spent to visit the Upazila Land Office and Union Land Office for staff to observe the government’s process for *khas* land settlement. The workshop participants shared their queries about *khas* land issues with the Union Assistant Land Officer at Union Land Office and Assistant Commissioner-Land at Upazila Land Office. As a result of the training, the staff are now facilitating the process in close cooperation with government officials. Initially, 153 landless people have applied for government’s *khas* land.

Emergency food assistance to Myanmar refugee response program

In collaboration with World Food Programme, CARE Bangladesh provided emergency food assistance through commodity distribution to 18,000 refugee families who fled from Rakhine state in Myanmar. They are currently seeking temporary shelters in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar District. Out of 132.07 metric tons (MT) of commodities set for distribution, 105 MT were from SHOUHARDO III stock and the rest were supplied from CARE Bangladesh’s own resources.

Wohida and her two daughters had been staying in the camp since they fled in September 2017. “We received support from CARE and other organizations. During our stay here, I received rations that included rice, pulse, oil, chili and salt. We are grateful for all the support we receive, making us less worried on where our next meal would be coming from.”

Each of CARE’s 7-kilogram food package comprised of:

- two kilograms of vegetable oil
- four kilograms of pulses
- 0.5 kilogram of salt
- one-kilogram sugar
Six participants of SHOUHARDO III awarded with Joyeeta

Six participants of SHOUHARDO III from Kishoreganj, Sunamganj and Habiganj districts received the Joyeeta award by the government to recognize their successes. The award is given by Joyeeta Onneshone Bangladesh, a government initiative introduced in 2011 that has been empowering women by recognizing their work.

This award is given to successful women thriving in five different categories – economic development, education and employment, successful mother, prevention of repression and social development. SHOUHARDO III participants who were awarded are the following:

- Mahmuda Aktar from Sunamganj and Mst. Rina Aktar from Kishoreganj as successful mothers;
- Majeda Khatun and Shahanara Khatun from Kishoreganj for prevention of repression category;
- Kamrunnahar from Habiganj for economic development; and
- Anjana Rani Sutradhar from Sunamganj for social development.

CARE Bangladesh also recognized these awardees and honored them with crests and prize money of BDT 10,000 (USD$ 120) each. In an awarding event held at CARE’s Dhaka office, each awardee shared her story and how she successfully overcame all challenges that made her a recipient of Joyeeta award.
Gender outcome mapping workshop

SHOUHARDO III program organized a three-day residential workshop on gender outcome mapping from 27th to 29th November 2017.

SHOUHARDO III’s main accomplishment related to women’s empowerment was the continued development of gender outcome mapping in the community to track qualitative, actionable and observable gender behavior changes in different domains of change such as gendered division of labor and workload sharing in the household. From this, the Village Development Committees (VDCs) are already facilitating behavior changes such as male youth openly encouraging and supporting other young men to do household chores and older men encouraging their wives to engage in income-generating activities. The program also identified members to be part of the Men’s Forum – mostly male counterparts of female members in the community groups (FFBS; Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action (EKATA) and VDC the program works with) – who facilitate reflective dialogues in such forums emphasizing equity, equality, dignity and respectful relationships in both the family and community.

Key Achievements of SHOUHARDO III
(October 2017 to December 2017)

- 1,508 FFBS established
- 25,577 children reached with Growth Monitoring and Promotion session
- 80 communities developed their contingency plan
- 1,602 volunteers and PEP household members received capacity development training
- 136 Union Disaster Coordination Committee (UDCC) meetings facilitated
- 40 IGA-off-farm participants received vocational training
- 2,839 courtyard sessions organized with Pregnant and Lactating Women (PLW) and caregivers
- 63 coordination meetings in support of Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) organized at Union level
- 3,346 youth group members received training on governance including environment, resilience and advocacy issues
- 2,773 participants received training on Business Development Services (BDS)
- 86,591 MT supplementary rations distributed among PLW’s
- 23 couple workshops organized at Union level
- 37 sports and cultural events facilitated for the youth groups
About 64% of the population in Nageswari Upazila under Kurigram district, located 400 kilometers north of the capital Dhaka, are considered poor. This reality, accompanied by disasters that frequent the area, contribute to people having limited opportunities to enhance their productivity and income.

The farmers in this area are used to cultivating traditional crops such as rice and jute. These crops, apart from being labor intensive, do not give high returns to farmers. In one of the focus group discussions that SHOUHARDO III held with its participants in Ratanpur village, out of BDT 1,10,000 (USD $1,300) investment per hectare, they were only able to earn BDT 52,000 (USD $620). As the program aims to address underlying issues of food security and nutrition in the most vulnerable areas of Northern Bangladesh, SHOUHARDO III introduced the cultivation of new crops, which included maize.

“We were skeptical to try on new crops as we didn’t have any experience at all and of course we wanted to ensure that we will profit better,” said one of the farmers.

They were then trained through FFBS. As with all its activities, the program coordinated the initiative with the local government and in this context, communicated with the Sub Assistant Agriculture Officer (SAAO). The SAAO supported the proposed crops and FFBS model. SAAO also shared with the participants about the high demand of maize particularly in the poultry industry as feeds, is less labor-intensive and assures high returns for their hard-earned money. With this, 27 farmers were mobilized in Ratanpur village and took on the journey to adopt maize as their new crop.

The community agriculture volunteers facilitated the FFBS sessions focusing on cultivation, harvesting and post-harvesting technique of maize. The SAAO and representatives of BRAC Seed & Agro Enterprise along with the local seed dealer, Alam Traders, also attended the discussions to guide them on how to get quality inputs, especially seeds and sell their produce. In this village, the farmers got a special rate on seeds where it was sold to them at BDT 30 (USD $0.32), nearly half lower than market retail price per kilogram.

After the cultivation process, the traders offered to buy the maize at BDT 1,00,000 (USD $1,190) per 1,000 kilograms. To make sure that farmers get more, SHOUHARDO III consulted with other traders in the region including the wholesalers and linked the village farmers to them. They met and agreed on a fairer price, which resulted in BDT 1,86,000 (USD $2,200) pricing for every 1,000 kilograms. The farmers collated all their harvests and managed to sell 6,800 kilograms.

“From our investment of BDT 53,000 (USD $632), we earned BDT 1,54,000 (USD $1,824) which equated to BDT 1,00,000 (USD $1,192) profit, twice of what we were earning from rice and jute,” one of the farmers excitedly claimed.

Other villages got inspired from the farmers in Ratanpur and continued on their maize cultivation with coordinated efforts too.