Project Background

Food Security for the Ultra Poor is a five year project funded by the European Union and being implemented by CARE Bangladesh and three national partners, Sabalamby Unnayan Samity (SUS), Assistance for Slum Dwellers (ASD) and People’s Oriented Program Implementation (POPI). The overall project goal is to reduce extreme poverty, food insecurity and vulnerability in the Haor region of Northeast Bangladesh. FSUP-H targets 55,000 ultra poor households, with a focus on ultra poor women, in the three districts of Sunamganj, Netrakona and Kishoreganj.

Message from CARE’s Country Director

It is my great pleasure to present the first edition of the Food Security for the Ultra Poor newsletter. The FSUP-H project has achieved a lot since 2009 and this newsletter is an opportunity to highlight achievements, share learning and promote upcoming events.

My recent visit to the FSUP-H project drew attention to the vulnerabilities of the poorest in the Haor region. Programming in this remote and changing environment is a constant challenge but through the FSUP-H project, CARE and its partners are reducing food insecurity and extreme poverty for some of the poorest women and their families.

In this edition you will find some interesting articles looking at FSUP-H’s unique approach to programming in the Haor region including: incoming generating opportunities, flood protection walls and community nutrition gardens, as well as, sharing some stories from the field and special events. We hope that you find this newsletter interesting and thought provoking. If you have any thoughts or comments on this newsletter please let the FSUP-H team know using the contact details below.

FSUP-H Approaches and Learning

Income Generating Activities: Reducing vulnerability of the poorest

Since 2009, FSUP-H has provided 55,000 ultra-poor women with business training and a small business grant to set up their business. FSUP-H staff are now reviewing the impact these income generating activities are having on the lives of these women.

Diversification of income sources for FSUP-H participants is an important factor in improving resilience to disasters, reducing household vulnerability and improving food security.
The recent outcome survey carried out for FSUP-H in January and February 2012 found that 76% of FSUP-H beneficiaries surveyed had three or more sources of income compared to the baseline figure in 2009 of 7.6%. This considerable increase in income sources for FSUP-H beneficiaries is interesting and suggests, through income diversification FSUP-H households are becoming more resilient to shocks and have increased food security. The case studies below highlight this;

In 2010, Helena received business management training and a small grant from FSUP-H. Helena made the decision to purchase a cow and generate a regular income by selling milk, as well as fattening the cow to increase its value. The cow was then sold and with the profit Helena was able to purchase a fishing net for her husband in addition to purchasing a new cow. Now both Helena and her husband are able to support their five children with the income from fishing and cow rearing.

Gelu from the village of Kadim Maizhati in Kishoreganj district chose to invest her FSUP-H grant in leasing agricultural land. The profit gained from the land allowed Gelu to diversify her household income by purchasing pigeons. Gelu now has sixteen pairs of pigeons and each pair can produce one squab (baby pigeon) a month. The pigeons are very easy to keep and live above the house, costing fifteen taka to feed a day. A pair of baby pigeons can be sold at market for three hundred taka providing a valuable source of additional income for the family.

Both beneficiaries in the examples utilised the profits of their business to invest in a new income source thus improving their overall resilience and reducing their reliance on a single income.

Protection Walls – FSUP-H’s Unique Approach to Flood Risk Reduction!

This year, FSUP-H has constructed a total of eighteen flood protection walls across the project’s three working districts of Sunamganj, Netrokona and Kishoreganj. In such a difficult and remote region of Bangladesh this is an impressive achievement and will significantly improve the lives and livelihoods of the ultra-poor.

FSUP-H has facilitated the design and construction of the walls using a unique approach involving the beneficiaries, local communities and indigenous Haor practices.

Without using cement, the walls are constructed by stacking bricks three to four layers thick. The construction of the walls are overseen by the community construction society, a group of project beneficiaries and local community members, who are trained to ensure the quality of the wall and how to maintain it in the future. If the wall is damaged the community people have the technical skills to repair the damage.

Photo: ©Furnima Rani Bachari/CARE
Nutrition Gardens

In order to achieve improved health, hygiene and nutrition FSUP-H helped train beneficiaries on homestead gardening techniques and distributed vegetable seeds to help establish homestead gardens. Despite this being a success for the project, the monitoring reports revealed that a number of women were unable to benefit from homestead gardening due to landlessness and lack of space. In response to this, FSUP-H has begun to establish nutrition gardens in the communities where it works. These gardens are tended by adolescent girls who often don’t have space to grow vegetables in their homes.

The girls learn about the benefits of a nutritious and balanced diet and are encouraged to grow a diverse range of nutrient rich vegetables. The vegetables are then distributed to the poorest, including pregnant and lactating women.

Since establishing the garden in February, Pushpa and her fellow women’s empowerment group members have grown an impressive 62kgs of vegetables and fruit. They have added these to their diet as well as distributing them to the poorest pregnant women in the community.
Savings Group: Sumitra’s Story

Sumitra was smiling as she sliced radishes. She explained, “earlier I was afraid when strangers came to my village but now I happily greet visitors and share my stories”. As Sumitra told her story the reasons for this change became clear.

Sumitra lives in the village of Shohila in the district of Kishoreganj with her husband and her two sons aged 5 and 7. She has lived in the village for 20 years and has always been poor. In the past her family relied on the small income her husband earns as a local ferry boat driver to get by. It was always a constant struggle for Sumitra to stretch her husband’s income to feed her family. But life began to change for Sumitra and her family 3 years ago when she became a beneficiary of the Food Security for the Ultra-Poor Project (FSUP-H).

In Shohila, the FSUP-H project assisted 139 of the poorest households in setting up a savings group where each family saves a handful of rice each day. At the end of the week the rice is gathered together, weighed and sold at market. The savings can then be invested collectively or used to help the families during hard times.

When the local landlords saw how the poorest families in the village were working together to improve their lives 11 landlords became inspired to donate over 9 acres of land for 6 years to the families involved in the savings group.

Using their savings the families cultivated sweet potatoes, green chillies, cauliflowers, beans and radishes on the land. “Now we don’t have to buy vegetables at market and my family’s diet has improved” Sumitra explained. The group has also used the profits from selling excess vegetables to rent a further 4 acres of land and Sumitra’s family has used some of the increased income to rent an additional plot of land. Now Sumitra is full of confidence for the future, laughing she explained, “I will teach my sons how to save money and they will teach their children”.
False landlords no longer a problem for twenty three families thanks to Shasti

Photo: Richard Sorman, CARE

FSUP-H staff are working tirelessly in the remote communities of the Haor region to improve the lives of the poorest. Many of the staff have had to overcome huge challenges to succeed in their work. In recognition of this great work, each newsletter edition will pay tribute to a member of staff who has often gone above and beyond their duty to achieve great things for the ultra-poor.

Name: Shasti Chowdhury
Designation: Community Facilitator – CARE Bangladesh

How long have you been working for the project?
Since June 2009

What impact is FSUP-H having in your working area?

After implementing activities in the villages for the past three years, the poorest women we work with are now much more confident and courageous in their communities. They now openly communicate with government and non government institutions and as a result of this have been able to access different government services. The women are also far more economically active in the community, working on their businesses and growing vegetables in their homesteads. The savings groups established by the project for the women are active and in one village where I work the women have now saved 250,000 taka. The women are also learning from each other as news of success such as accessing Khas land travels fast.

What has been your greatest success in your work for FSUP-H?

Through support from the project, we have assisted twenty three families to access Khas land that they were previously living on without legal entitlement in Hajariagaon village. The families were paying rent to local elites who did not own the land. As a result of FSUP-H’s work in the community the ultra-poor families were able to receive full legal entitlement to the land and no longer pay rent to fake land lords. The project also supported the families to raise their land through cash for work to protect against the annual floods.

What has been the greatest challenge in your work?

During the process of applying for Khas land for the families the local muscle men who were charging rent illegally threatened me and tried to stop the process taking place. Also the local government bureaucracy meant the process was long and tiresome.

How did you overcome these challenges?

To overcome the intimidation I organised meetings with well respected village elites who were able to influence the trouble makers. We discussed the importance of supporting the poorest families in the community. I also worked with the project officer and manager to sit with local government stakeholders to discuss the problems and motivate them to support FSUP-H. These meetings helped to speed up the government process and allow the Khas land application to be accepted in the community.
Special Events

CARE CD visits FSUP Project

In May, Nick Southern, CARE Bangladesh’s Country Director, visited FSUP-H to observe project activities. Nick held a short discussion with project staff in the Netrokona District office before visiting two project sites in Modon and Mohongonj Upazilas.

In Modon, Nick visited Deosohil village and saw FSUP-H’s construction of the protection wall, where he gave a short speech remarking on the success of FSUP-H and the importance of the protection wall. In Kandapara village, he visited an Early Childhood Care Development School (ECCD) which had been funded and established through the village development committee (VDC) set up by FSUP-H project. The students of the school presented their work and performed a short dance and poetry recital.

FSUP-H online

Rushnara Ali a British member of Parliament visited FSUP-H project last year.

To see a short video clip of the visit go to CARE’s YouTube channel:
http://www.youtube.com/user/careinternationaluk

A case study of the success in Hajarigoan, where 23 households received Khas land mentioned above can be found in the CARE International UK

website here:
land-in-bangladesh

Photo: Angela Flett
A c h i e v e m e n t s t o d a t e

20 Flood protection walls have been constructed across the project implementing area.

55,000 ultra-poor women have received business management training and seed money to begin a business.

645 Village Development Committees and 450 Women’s Empowerment Groups have been established giving the poorest a voice in their community often for the first time.

207 Nutrition gardens have been established giving extremely poor adolescent girls access to nutritious vegetables and fruits.

817 ultra-poor women have been elected to different local government standing committees.

Over 300 previously landless families now have the full legal entitlements to their own plot of land.

More than 80 ultra-poor families have legal access to water bodies for fishing.

9,400 women have received cash for work to construct community flood protection structures such as raising homesteads above the flood water level.

645 Savings Groups have been established with a membership of over 44,000 ultra-poor women.

Photo: ©Angela Platt/CARE
Meet the partners

Sabalamby Unnayan Samity (SUS) has been working with underprivileged and marginalised people, especially women, children and adolescents in disaster prone areas of Bangladesh since 1986 and has been working with CARE since 1994.

Since 1990, Assistance for Slum Dwellers (ASD) has been focused on community development and women empowerment activities across Bangladesh. ASD has been a CARE partner since 1995.

People's Oriented Program Implementation (POPI) has been working with CARE since 1998 and specializes in poverty focused food security programs in hard to reach areas.

If you have any comments or thoughts you would like to share please do so by contacting Shahena Parvin (Knowledge Management Technical Coordinator) at Shahena@bd.care.org.

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