Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO) III is a five-year program that aims to achieve improved gender equitable food and nutrition security and resilience for 168,500 Poor and Extreme Poor (PEP) households living in the eight districts of Northern Char and Haor wetland areas of Bangladesh. The program is funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and implemented by six Partner Non-Government Organizations.

During the monsoon season, flooding is an additional issue for the ultra-poor to worry about especially with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. About 12 with 55 members in Vati Tahirpur and Ratansree villages of Sunamganj took shelter in Tahirpur Government High School.

Upon receiving the information that no one at the shelter was wearing any mask or were reluctant to do so, the community groups saving (following Village Savings and Loan Association/VSLA approach) members of Vati Tahipur met for an emergency meeting and came up with the decision to conduct an awareness raising campaign and provide mask for the people in the evacuation center.

They allocated 1,000 BDT (11.79 USD) money from the Social Fund of VSLA and purchased 100 pieces of mask. They held an awareness session on COVID-19 on 29 June 2020. The people living in the shelter were very receptive of the initiative and expressed their gratitude to the president and other VSLA members.

Communities rise by lifting others

On a similar effort, Lucky Akter, the President of the Village Development Committee (VDC) of Mazerhati village under Austagram union of Kishoregonj visited every house of Mazerhati village and disseminated awareness messages on COVID-19.

Cunera Begum, one of the members of Gobindasree VDC said, “Our VDC is interlinked with government and NGOs that are providing support during this pandemic. It liaised, coordinated and pursued the support providers. We discussed about the update, find the people who were being left behind and pursued with the organizations that are supporting the poor.”
Floods swamp Haor areas

Heavy rainfall of the monsoon season caused flash flood in Netrokona and Sunamganj districts. Though the water started to decrease within a week, it left an adverse impact for the residents.

- Only 50-60% Aus rice (local rice variety) field may survive after the flood water recedes but vegetables and Aman (another rice variety) seedling-bed were damaged fully in Dowarabazar and Tahirpur Upazilla.
- Almost all fishes were washed out of the ponds due to high flood water in Dowarabazar Upazila.

Safia Islam of Vati Tahirpur village shared, “My son is a tailor, but due to flood he became workless now. We had to sell two hens for only 300 tk. to cover our family needs and that was 30% less price compare to situation. Eventually, this situation is most miserable for us. We can’t think how we can live in the coming days.”

According to Upazila Fisheries Department and fish farmers, the approximate cost of the fishes loss is about 20 million BDT (236,000 USD) at Dowarabazar and 300,000 BDT (3,500 USD) at Tahirpur upazila/sub-district.

Approximately 30-40% livestock feed (straw) was damaged and some farmers are struggling to manage feed for their cattle.

79 families in Tahirpur and 31 families (where about 50% were SHOUHARDO III families) in Dowarabazar, Sunamganj were forced to shift to the shelters as their habitats were badly damaged.

SOUHARDO III COVID Response – how cash support is helping the poor

As per plan, in June 2020, SHOUHARDO III provided cash support to 3,395 vulnerable people living in Haor region. Among them, 1,765 were under Extreme Poor and 1,630 from Poor categories.

To the SHOUHARDO participants, the most vulnerable people living in Char and Haor, this cash support is helping a lot to overcome this difficult time.

“It was really great to our five members’ family to have cash support from SHOUHARDO III. Often, we were skipping meals as during the COVID-19 pandemic it has become almost impossible to manage essential food every day. During such painful days, I got the money and it was like a big light amidst impassable darkness. We bought food and other essential items for keeping ourselves clean”, Ruzina Begum of Vati Tahirpur village of Sunamganj district shared

Rojina Begum is one of the breastfeeding mothers who received commodity support from SHOUHARDO III till March 2020.

She became worried about to manage extra food, whereas, regular meals have become difficult to manage.

In such a difficult time, she received 6,000 BDT (70 USD) from SHOUHARDO III which supported her a lot on managing food to ensure a healthy life for her and the baby.

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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 Government.