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Women's Empowerment:  
THE  
**JOURNEY**  
SO FAR

The experience of the SHOUHARDO Program in Bangladesh



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The experience of the SHOUHARDO Program in Bangladesh

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WayFair Limited, UK

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**Published by**

Knowledge Management Unit

SHOUHARDO II Program

CARE Bangladesh

July 2014

**Design**

Nipun/Drik, Bangladesh

# PREFACE

Gender relations and gender inequality in Bangladesh is often understood as 'the problem with women', leaving the construction of masculinity in society unanalyzed and unaddressed. SHOUHARDO II has promoted female entrepreneurship, encouraged greater participation by mothers in their children's education and supported self-help groups.

EKATA is a girls' and women's empowerment model. The model embraces very participatory processes and does not impose any ideology or criteria. Rather, the group members themselves define the meaning of their 'empowerment' and act according to their own plan.

The success of SHOUHARDO can be portrayed through the accounts of thousands of women whose lives have been changed through its various program activities and interventions. Women's empowerment, the tangible changes in their lives, can be noticed on several dimensions: freedom of movement, increased access to and control over income and resources, reduced violence against women, and increased women's leadership.

The selected stories, photographs and descriptions contained in this document only reflect a small part of the transformational change related to women's empowerment that is occurring in SHOUHARDO II program sites in the rural corners of Bangladesh.

# CONTENTS

SHOUHARDO II SITES	6
INTRODUCTION	8
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE BANGLADESH CONTEXT	10
CARE'S MODEL OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT	13
A DRIVING FORCE: EKATA	15
ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN	20
CHANGES TO WOMEN'S ROLES IN FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS	25
THE GENERATIONAL CHANGE MODEL	31
HEALTH AND NUTRITION	37
REFLECTIONS: THE FUTURE FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN BANGLADESH	41
Key References and Additional Resources	49
List of Acronyms	50





## SHOUHARDO II SITES

**SHOUHARDO II reached more than 2 million people in three of the poorest parts of Bangladesh: the north and mid Char, the Haor region, and the Coastal region.**

### Haor

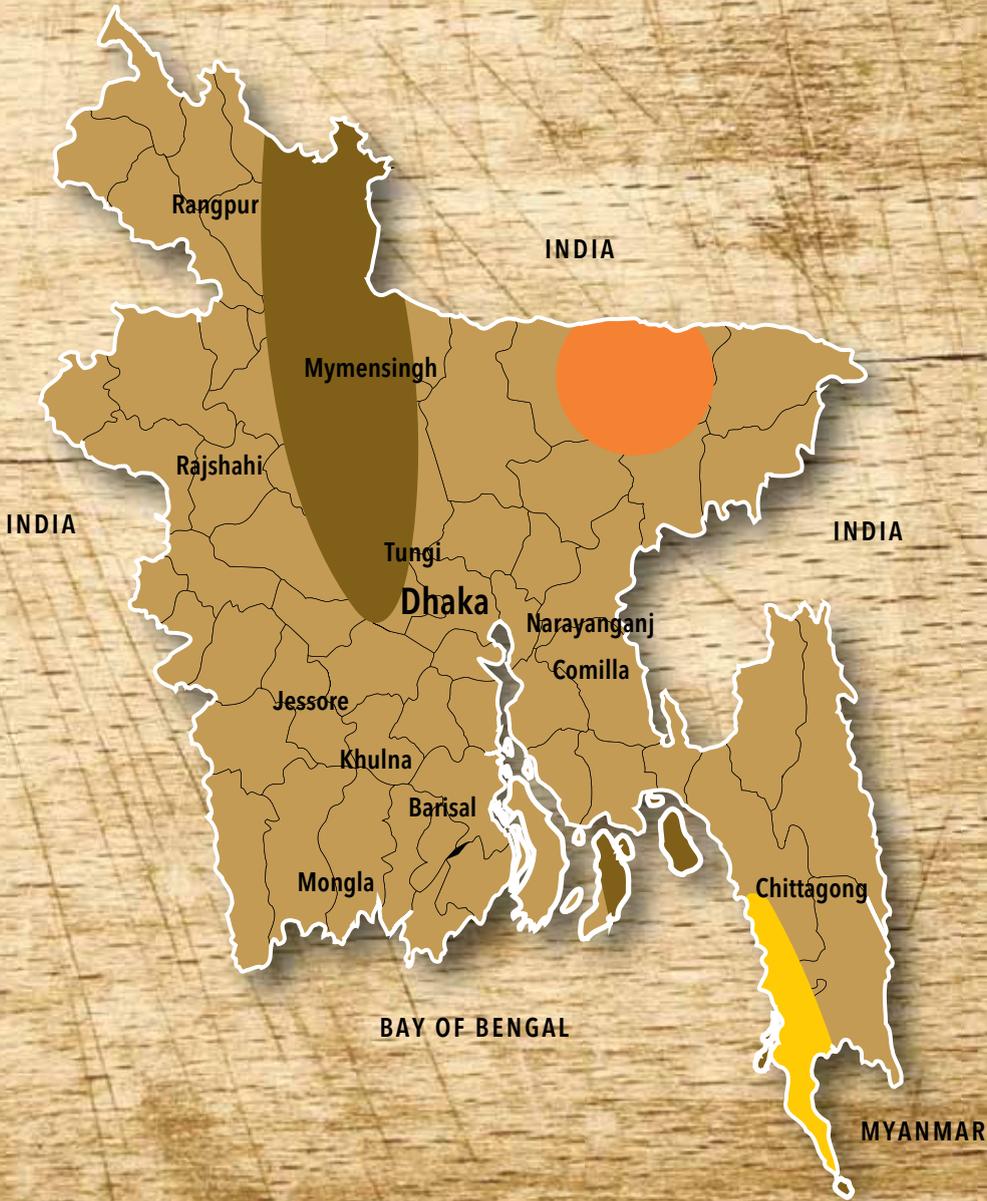
This low-lying land includes communities that live on elevated earthen mounds. The areas are submerged in water for half the year, and the extreme climate is a challenge to the women and men who live there. During the dry season residents can farm; however, during monsoon season they retreat to small mounds of land that sit above temporary inland oceans.

### North and Mid Char

Chars are land masses that form along river banks and sandbars from sediment carried in the water. They are inherently unstable and susceptible to erosion because of their very nature, existing in floodplains.

### Coastal

This region experiences regular storms, cyclones and tidal waves. Infertile soil further limits agriculture. Though fertile areas exist, they are owned by wealthy individuals. Productive land is only available to impoverished people through the practice of sharecropping, where farm labor is paid with a share of the crop yield.



# INTRODUCTION

The SHOUHARDO and SHOUHARDO II Programs have aimed to reduce food insecurity among Bangladesh's poor and extreme poor households by addressing underlying causes, including women's empowerment and livelihoods.

Photo © Adnan Kabir/CARE



CARE Bangladesh began implementing SHOUHARDO (Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities) II in June 2010. The five-year Multi-Year Assistance Program (MYAP) builds on the previous phase (SHOUHARDO) which established an effective, integrated model for reducing child malnutrition while contributing to greater livelihood security and women's empowerment. The design of the SHOUHARDO II Program can be seen as a culmination of CARE's longstanding presence, experience and commitment to Bangladesh and their mission to address both humanitarian and developmental needs, with a strong focus on the most marginalized groups in society. The program is implemented in four regions (the North Char, Mid-Char, Haor and Coastal areas), reaching 11 districts, 30 upazilas (sub-districts) and 172 unions (the smallest area of government administration). The overall goal of SHOUHARDO II is to 'transform the lives of 370,000 Poor and Extreme Poor (PEP) households in 11 of the poorest and most marginalized districts in Bangladesh by reducing their vulnerability to food insecurity.'

The SHOUHARDO II Program implements a wide range of activities in communities that together support the poor and undernourished in working towards greater socio-economic development and social change. One of the Program's five strategic objectives is that 'Poor and Extreme Poor women and adolescent girls (will be) empowered in their families, communities and Union Parishads' (UP - the lowest tier of local government bodies, serving communities). Working towards this goal, SHOUHARDO II implements an 'Empowerment Knowledge and Transformative Action' (EKATA) model for promoting life-skills education, empowerment and social change. Using the EKATA model, the PEP women and adolescent girls participating in the first SHOUHARDO Program were found to be better able to analyze their own circumstances in a structured manner, with a view to generating solutions to the problems that they faced.



# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE BANGLADESH CONTEXT

In their recent book, *An Uncertain Glory*, Amartya Sen and his long-time collaborator, Jean Dreze, compared the development experience of India with that of Bangladesh over the last 20 years. Their comparison is illuminating on many levels. Their main point is that although between 1990 and 2011, India's per capita income has grown from 60% greater than that of Bangladesh to about double, within the same period, Bangladesh has overtaken India on a range of social indicators. These include life expectancy, child survival, immunization rates, reduced fertility rates, and some education indicators. For example, life expectancy in Bangladesh in 2011 was 69 years, compared with India's 65 years<sup>1</sup>.

These figures are extraordinary. What has made the difference? Essentially, as Sen himself notes, 'the most important clue is a sustained positive change in gender relations'<sup>2</sup>. In short, the difference is the greater level

of women's empowerment that has taken place in Bangladesh.

This is quite remarkable. Writing less than one hundred years ago, Begum Rokeya, described by author Golem Murshid as Bengal's first feminist<sup>3</sup>, compares the condition of women in Bangladesh to slavery:

**“The status of women is not better than the slaves. The difference is that the slaves can dream of their freedom, or some may even gain freedom somehow, but women cannot even hope for that. They are not slaves only, their minds have been enslaved forever. This enslavement is recognized and established in the language and values of society.”**

<sup>1</sup> Dreze, J. & Sen, A. 2013. p. 54–55.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Murshid, G. 1993



Photo © Asafuzzaman/CARE

Even at independence in 1971, women's movement was extremely restricted, and indeed it is only within the last generation that change has really taken place. As recently as the 1980s, projects such as CARE's Rural Maintenance Project in north Bengal, Rokeya's home area, first achieved general acceptance of extremely poor rural women leaving their homes and *paras* for work. Since then, women's mobility has grown, although there are still restrictions on it, even in the north. In the extreme south - east, the Teknaf area south of Cox's Bazar, women's mobility is still restricted in ways similar to that which pertained in the north a generation ago. However, the large numbers of women that work in the textile industry today – acknowledging that there are plenty of rights issues that need resolving with regard to conditions in these factories – is indicative of the large change that has taken place in women's status and mobility.

Why has this change happened in Bangladesh to a much greater extent than India? Here Dreze and Sen refer directly to the role Non Government Organizations (NGO) have played in focusing on the basic determinants of factors like health care, education, nutrition, and food security. 'Bangladesh's endeavours have been helped by flourishing NGO activities, from comprehensive development efforts to specialised micro-credit initiatives (led by organizations such as BRAC and Grameen Bank).'<sup>[4]</sup>

But of all NGOs in Bangladesh, the one that has arguably focused as much as any other over the last decade on women's empowerment at the local level is CARE. Thus, in the context of the larger picture that Dreze and Sen paint, CARE Bangladesh also has a story to tell.

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4 Dreze, J. & Sen, A, 2013, p. 62.

If we return to Begum Rokeya, the nature of this story was perhaps foretold by her.

**“If women have to earn independently in order to achieve equality then that must be done. Women are suitable for any profession including judge, barrister, and magistrate. One day they may become Viceroy. Women are able to run business also with the amount of work they have to do in husbands’ households. Why should they not be engaged in agriculture? Overall, they should not be dependent on anyone for their livelihoods.”**<sup>[5]</sup>

There are many different projects managed by CARE Bangladesh that have contributed to this work, starting with the afore-mentioned Rural Maintenance Project. Over the past fifteen years there has been a plethora of projects working on gender violence issues and addressing the situations of specific groups of marginalized women – sex workers, drug users, and, more recently, garment workers. CARE now has an overall women's empowerment program, with its own theory of change. Within the context of this broader work, SHOUHARDO's role, in both its iterations, has been in particular to promote the role of women in addressing nutritional and food security issues.

<sup>5</sup> Begum Rokeya in Murshid, G. 1993.



## CARE'S MODEL OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



Photo © CARE

Generally speaking, women's empowerment is any effort that helps women and girls navigate and influence their worlds. Women should be empowered because it is their fundamental right as

human beings. CARE's overall approach to women's empowerment is based on an Agency - Structure - Relations model (Figure 1), which highlights the connectedness of all three dimensions. This model had

two methodological implications. Firstly, for enduring women's empowerment to take place, change must occur in all three dimensions. Secondly, the process of empowerment is as important as the outcomes, hence the importance of the arrows, showing ongoing influence and change.

Another way of looking at this framework is to say that women's empowerment requires change in the economic, social and political dimensions. As Begum Rokeya observed over 100 years ago, for women to

achieve equal respect with men – and equality – they have to be able to establish independent livelihoods. Thus a starting point of the SHOUHARDO II women's empowerment strategy is promoting the economic empowerment of women, to benefit not only household food production and income, and hence the nutritional status of children and adults, but also to promote women's role in household decision making.

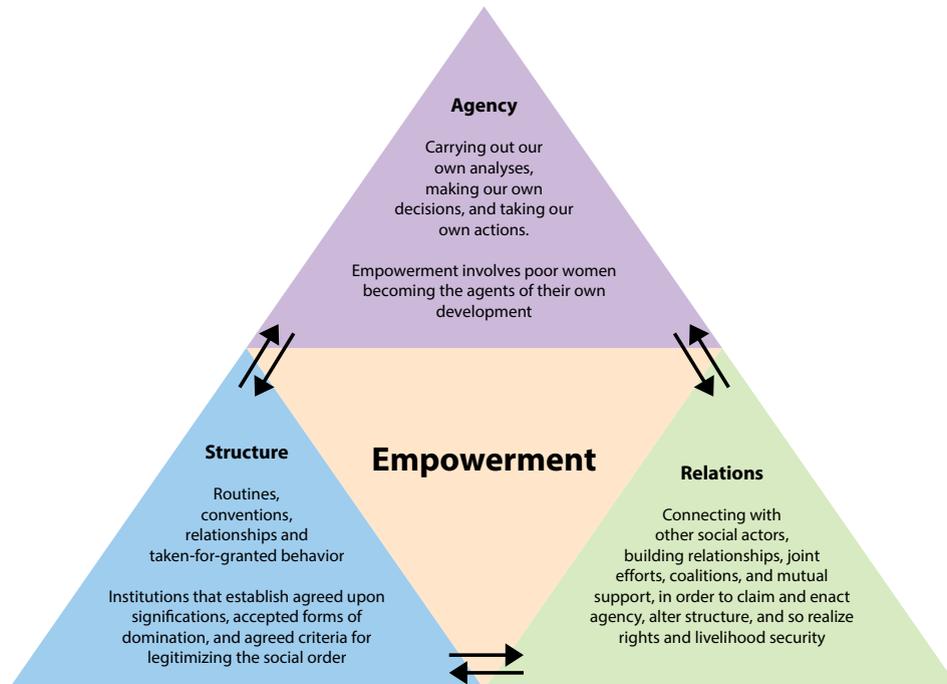


Figure 1

## A DRIVING FORCE: EKATA

EKATA groups serve as the core component of SHOUHARDO II's women's empowerment strategy. At the initiation of the Program, a number of villages were selected to form these all-female groups, with membership comprising both adult women and adolescent girls. This allows a focus on the issues and priorities of women of different ages: the group

provides a mechanism whereby adolescent girls can receive support in delaying their marriages and returning to school, while for adult women, the group often assists them in securing assets so they can establish their own sources of income, as well as improving food availability and nutrition outcomes for their children and families.



EKATA is one of several community - led groups established by the SHOUHARDO II Program in beneficiary villages. A pivotal group in this network is the Village Development Committee (VDC). In most villages, the VDC is a group of 11 elected members, usually with a 6 - 5 split between men and women. This near - parity representation is important as it allows a healthy dialogue between male and female members

to take place, including on issues of gender equity, facilitated by the gender training the groups receive. The relationships between the VDC, EKATA and other groups established by SHOUHARDO II are illustrated below.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the VDC is the locus for planning and central conduit for SHOUHARDO II

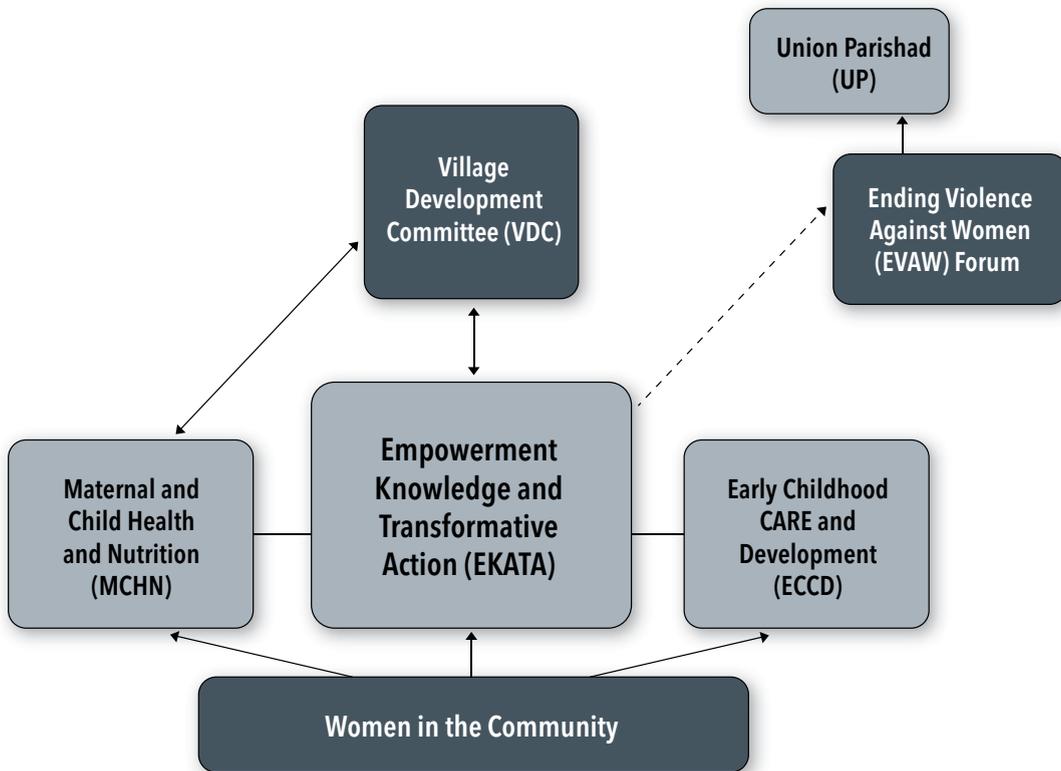


Figure 2

resources in the villages. Each VDC determines the community's development priorities for the coming year, within a range of agenda options offered by SHOUHARDO II. The membership of women in these groups ensures shared representation in the groups' decisions. Assisting the VDCs to conduct a gender

analysis, described below, has also helped gain the support of the male VDC members to address relevant issues.

A central part of the formation of an EKATA group is a gender analysis. Also conducted during the formation

**‘Men and women should have their rights, and nobody should dominate the other’, said one woman in a VDC meeting. The men agreed: ‘No-one should be dominating; there should be equality.’**

**– Uttar Horishshor VDC, Kaunia, Rangpur**

of each VDC, this analysis focuses on four core gender issues (see below), and is designed to initiate a discussion around the status of each issue, and how much women would like to address them.

In this way, SHOUHARDO’s EKATA approach is unique in that it offers small community groups an opportunity to define for themselves what women’s empowerment looks like in their own community and their own lives. In assisting this process, a key part of the capacity-building of EKATA members is to help them understand existing legislation with respect to women’s and girls’ rights. This knowledge is then available to help them articulate their empowerment aspirations in light of legal frameworks, and assist them in resisting and advocating against certain cultural practices, such as early marriage, that are in conflict with the law. Following the gender analysis, there is then a set of activities that the groups carry out, including creating an ‘Aspirational Woman’ describing the woman that the members, particularly the adolescent girls, would like to become. Following the initial analysis and planning work, the EKATA groups receive regular, twice - weekly training, provided by a SHOUHARDO II community facilitator, who works with a Partner NGO volunteer. This training includes providing members with an understanding

of the restrictions that are placed on them within the context of the patriarchal culture. They are then in a much better position to decide upon which courses of action are most relevant to them, and how they can pursue these within their own relationships.

SHOUHARDO II’s Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers function alongside the EKATA groups to contribute to the transformational change of target communities, supporting women’s empowerment initiatives and creating access to a joyful learning environment for children. ECCD programs have an impact on women’s empowerment that is not often recognized, contributing to participating women’s knowledge and awareness. Access to local early childhood education and care reduces the time women need to spend with children and therefore enables women to participate in income - earning activities, as

### **The four core issues of a Gender Analysis**

- 1. Women's access to and control over income and resources.**
- 2. Women's and children's (especially girls') health care, including nutrition, treatment and reproductive care.**
- 3. Violence against women (at the family and community levels).**
- 4. Women's leadership (at the family, committee and community levels).**

well as social initiatives. At the same time it has been recognized that educating girls has a long - term impact on increasing income and productivity and results in smaller, healthier and better-educated families.

## Successes

Despite the persistent male dominance of social and political power relations, confirmed in the findings of Dreze and Sen and the experience of the SHOUHARDO Programs, progress is being made on the empowerment of rural women in Bangladesh. Evidence suggests that EKATA groups are able to contribute significantly to improvements in women's agency, with some changes in relations and social norms.

A thematic study on women's empowerment<sup>61</sup> in the first SHOUHARDO Program noted improvements in women's agency, defined as 'women's decision-making through choices from available options'. The study explained that improvements in agency were accomplished when women carry out analyses, generally facilitated through EKATA processes. The most significant evidence of improved agency was apparent in women's reports of increased mobility, marked by experiences such as going to the market, training events or to school outside the village parameters. In addition, SHOUHARDO recipients particularly demonstrated agency at the collective level, through

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6 Magar, V & Jahan, F. 2010.



informed and collective discussions and planned activities – this has significant overlap with solidarity, and EKATA groups have shown evidence of positive group action for women's empowerment. The final evaluation of the first SHOUHARDO Program also found a direct correlation between participation in an EKATA group and indicators of women's empowerment, including women's decision - making power, freedom of movement, freedom from patriarchal beliefs and women's likelihood of earning cash income.<sup>[7]</sup>

There is also evidence that EKATA groups have contributed to structural and relational changes in their villages. Solidarity itself is a structural change: where previously women were not organized within their communities, EKATA and VDC groups offer a means by which women can meet and discuss their needs, and therefore themselves constitute new socio - political structures that enable women's empowerment. Through these structures, women are able to participate meaningfully and constructively to public life.

The increased self - esteem, confidence and decision-making power enabled by EKATA, combined with an increased understanding and analysis of the opportunities available to women, provide the fundamental tools needed to interact with structural barriers to empowerment. The Women's Empowerment Thematic Review of the first SHOUHARDO Program found that the process of groups collectively addressing violence against women and early marriage led to lasting structural changes regarding these issues. Working alongside existing government structures, such as the *Nari Nirjatn Protirodh Committee* (NNPC

or Ending Violence Against Women Committee), EKATA groups were also able to connect women to existing community - level services and entitlements.

These changes in turn influence village relationships: in order to make create social changes and access and utilise entitlements, women needed to embark on a process of negotiation with men in their households, families and communities, including cultural gatekeepers such as social elites and government officials. This necessarily involves women asserting ownership of the decisions made about their lives, causing the gradual reshaping and reestablishment of relationships over time.



7 TANGO International, 2009.

## ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A major focus of SHOUHARDO II's work with regards to women's empowerment has been to address the issue of domestic violence against women. This has been a major theme in the work of CARE Bangladesh since the late 1990s, when its first analytical and programming work in this area began.

In SHOUHARDO II villages, there has been an increased awareness of legal issues related to women's rights and of the service providers who are available to offer support if women face violence. Measures that SHOUHARDO II has undertaken to achieve this include making women aware of their rights as per the 'Domestic Violence Act' of 2010, which for the first time made it unlawful for husbands to beat their wives in Bangladesh.

The Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) forum is another program-based structure that acts as a 'watch-dog' for issues related to violence against women within

SHOUHARDO II. Formed at the union level, each EVAW forum consists of approximately 11 - 15 representatives, including one from each SHOUHARDO II village. Members use existing village level forums, such as the VDC, EKATA, Men's Engagement Groups and Maternal Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) groups to sensitize to, discuss and take action on Violence Against Women (VAW). The EVAW forums provide referral to various services for VAW survivors, including to legal aid, medical aid and support, and counseling. The EVAW committee members conduct quarterly meetings with the NNPC, a special committee of the UP, which is responsible for providing VAW support and referrals for women located within the area. They discuss and review ongoing VAW issues in their union and request financial support from the UP to address these issues.

NOW I AM NO LONGER WEAK  
Empowerment through  
**EKATA** membership

Shamsun is only 30 years old, but she is a grandmother. Married at the age of 12, she became a mother at 14 and her daughters, in turn, were married young. She has no sons and her husband has passed away, so she lives with one of her daughters in Rangikhali Village, Teknaf, with her three - year - old grand - daughter.

Through being a member of an EKATA group, Shamsun has learnt about the negative consequences of early marriage. Her second daughter is 13 years old and studies in a madrassa; Shamsun had wanted to arrange for her to marry young, but now she wants her daughter to continue her education. Because of the group she can now also sign her name and is earning income through vegetable cultivation. While previously she was unsure of her parenting skills, now she confidently makes decisions regarding her

children's lives. Earlier she felt weak. She was afraid of men; now she can talk to them and can even go to the UP to discuss her needs with the local representatives.

Her dream is now to build a house for her married daughter and arrange the marriage of her youngest daughter to a good person, once she has completed her education. Shamsun's dreams revolve around her children's lives, they are her future.

ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A facilitator  
**resolving conflict**  
in Rangpur

Once the woman had brought her situation to the EKATA group and the VDC was consulted, the facilitator went to hear from the husband. At first, he did not want to talk, and so rapport - building was done for the first few days. After that, she raised the issue of violence against his wife.

The facilitator talked with the wife separately, explaining that as she had left the home of her parents, she needs to feel cared for and respected in her new home with her husband. She emphasized the importance

of having peace in the family and explained how the conflict would also affect her children negatively.

With both spouses, she then explained the laws against domestic violence. She told the husband about the role of women in income-generating activities, encouraging him to support his wife in undertaking these: if they earn more, there will be less cause for conflict.

The fact that women are organized as EKATA and MCHN groups has enhanced their collective power. EKATA members are able to support women when they face domestic violence. They go to the concerned woman's home and counsel the husband, and in some cases are able to motivate him to change his behavior. While domestic violence is still considered a family issue, in many EKATA villages people understand that they will be challenged if they treat their wives badly, and this provides a basis for positive change. Data from the

SHOUHARDO II Mid-Term Review findings support this, with the percentage of women reporting violence in the home decreasing from 27.2% to 12%.<sup>[8]</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> National figures are much higher than this; for instance, a 2000 UNFPA report estimated that 47% of Bangladeshi women have been abused by their husbands.

# NO MORE VIOLENCE AGAINST Women:

A community making change

“ This was a trial of our strength as a community. Standing against this kind of violence and stopping illegal landgrabbing from poor people is a key challenge for us. ”

– Pranesh Baisnab, VDC Chairman



Photo © Anwar Hossain Chowdhury/CARE

Land is the main source of income for many poor Bangladeshis and illegal land - grabbing is a serious problem, threatening livelihoods. It poses an even greater threat to women, who often lack power in their communities to bring land - grabbers to justice and face violence should they try to protect their land.

EKATA is not the only structure put in place by SHOUHARDO to combat this kind of exploitation.

With only 30 percent of SHOUHARDO villages hosting an EKATA group, it is essential that women's empowerment is embedded in different ways.

Chanchala Rani Sutradhor, 33, lives in the Baushi Village of Derai Upazila (sub-district), in the Sunamganj District.

**Extremely poor households are vulnerable to illegal land grabbing. In many circumstances these incidents are not reported, as affected households don't have access to the powerbrokers who can mediate on their behalf.**

A year ago, Chanchala had the opportunity to participate in the SHOUHARDO II Program and became part of the Comprehensive Homestead Development (CHD) initiative, learning new environmental management skills and building a productive homestead garden.

As Chanchala was starting to improve her homestead, one of her four children became severely ill and required expensive and urgent treatment. Chanchala had no choice but to take an emergency loan of BDT 5,000 (or USD 64.50), which required her to sell a quarter of her small plot of land. The buyer took advantage of Chanchala's desperate situation, and, along with his two brothers, took over the remaining part of her plot by planting trees. When Chanchala protested to them about this illegal land grabbing, the buyer threatened to evict her family from their homestead, and beat her so severely that she was taken to the hospital, unconscious.

When the SHOUHARDO II VDC heard about the incident the VDC members communicated with the union - level NNPC. In response to the events, the VDC and UP members organized a *salish* (local arbitration). Subsequently, VDC, UP members and villagers agreed that the land - grabber would have to return the illegally taken land and bear all expenses related to the treatment of Chanchala's injuries.

All the villagers promised that this kind of incident would never happen again in their village in the future. This was a milestone of community strength against violence towards women, and a key step towards empowerment. The VDC Chairman, Pranesh Baisnab, said 'This incident was a test of our strength as a community. Helping to end this kind of violence and stopping illegal land grabbing from poor people is a key challenge for us.'

## CHANGES TO WOMEN'S ROLES IN FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

Following independence, the early organization of women in Bangladesh women's organizations began to spring up on a large scale, due to the advent of organizations like Grameen and BRAC. These first groups met largely for micro - finance purposes and the organizational process focused on instilling a discipline around the rituals of the groups, and in particularly their repayment of the micro loans. There was little emphasis on encouraging initiative or innovation, and even less on challenging existing patriarchal power relations. Thus, even now, despite increasing recognition of women's potential to play income-generating roles (less so in the south - east), rural women still have very limited access to productive assets.

Recently, a Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index has been developed and piloted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI),

with USAID support, using a set of 10 indicators (these can be correlated with CARE's own Agency - Structure - Relations model of Women's Empowerment). In their initial piloting of the index, IFPRI confirmed in their conclusion that policies and programs should 'address the three domains that contribute most to disempowerment: weak leadership in the community, lack of control over resources, and lack of control over income'.<sup>[9]</sup> A major challenge for SHOUHARDO II has therefore been how to shift a deeply patriarchal culture, where access to resources is often regulated by patronage - based relationships, so that women are treated more fairly.

### Changes so far

It is clear that the lives of women in SHOUHARDO II have changed considerably. The following are some of

<sup>9</sup> Sraboni, E., Quisumbing, A. & Ahmed, A. 2013.

the core social and economic changes that have taken place.

Firstly, as a result of women's participation in EKATA, MCHN<sup>[10]</sup> and VDC groups, women are engaging more in productive activities, which are often agriculturally based, and as a result they are bringing more food into the household. Some of these main activities include cultivating vegetables and raising more poultry and livestock (such as goats and cows). Coupled with their greater knowledge of health and nutrition, this is particularly improving the nutritional status of infants and children.

<sup>10</sup> MCHN-Maternal Child Health and Nutrition (nutrition support only for poor and extreme poor pregnant and lactating women)

Second, this greater contribution to the household has improved the status of women within their households. The proportion of female beneficiaries who report taking part in decisions regarding spending money that they themselves have earned increased from 81% at baseline to 92% by the Mid-Term Review. Anecdotal evidence from beneficiaries suggests that they are being viewed more favorably by husbands and mothers-in-law, and their opinions are more likely to be considered in decision making processes. While a small achievement, most of these women would have been almost voiceless in household decision making beforehand, and this does denote a significant increase in their recognition. For instance, even adolescent girls



Photo © CARE

have been able to insist that they finish school and not be forced to marry early - with the knowledge that they have a legal right to insist on this, and that they have the support of a group who will help them if necessary. Women have also informally reported that they have a stronger voice in their communities, and that this is tied to the increased income they can now bring into the household, and the additional knowledge they have about caring for children. Very often for women, economic empowerment is a necessary precursor to achieving greater social empowerment, and the SHOUHARDO II experience is another instance of this.

Women's mobility has increased: initially this was simply because they were attending EKATA groups and VDC meetings, but evidence suggests that many women are now also going to the UP, and to union markets. At the outset, many women faced

resistance from their husbands and in-laws even just to participate in the project meetings. However, once outcomes beneficial to the lives of the children in the family were seen, then the opposition from in-laws eased.

There is thus an instrumental dimension to this change, and while there is a long way to go, it is a starting point. Now that women are more mobile than before, they can use their increased mobility and decision-making power to open up other opportunities, which otherwise would not have been possible. In particular, increased mobility and participation in SHOUHARDO related activities has increased women's confidence and they can express themselves better.

## BIG GAINS IN WOMEN'S DECISION - MAKING POWER

The percentage of women reporting that they participate in various types of decisions rose sharply in several caegories during the course of the first SHOUHARDO Program.

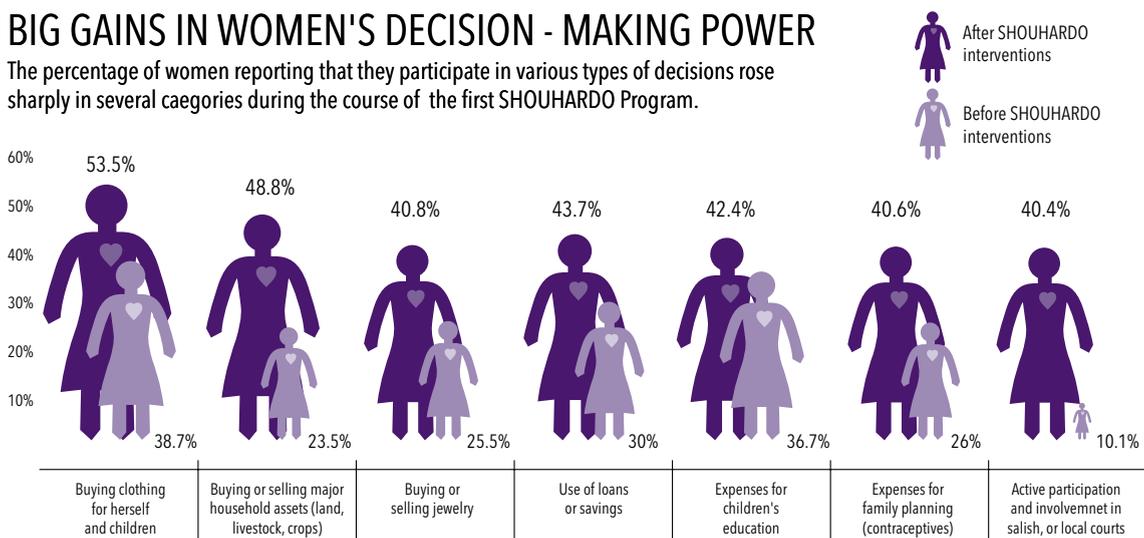


Figure 3

Due to the direct interventions of SHOUHARDO II in creating income-generating activities and community groups, Mid-Term data (Figure 4) shows that the number of women earning their own income and participating in a group has improved significantly since baseline data was obtained. While gains on other empowerment indicators – namely decision making power, mobility and freedom from patriarchal beliefs – have been small, this can be at least partially attributed

to the fact that results associated with these indicators are more difficult to achieve within a short time frame. Expectations that these results will be cumulative are supported by the changes shown in data formulate first SHOUHARDO Program (Figure 3). Anecdotal reports of improvements in these areas also point to greater changes emerging in the remaining period of the Program.

### Improving Women's Status within the Household

“Women were like domestic workers before; that has changed.”  
– VDC meeting, Halidakanda, Dharmapasha

“Women receive benefits by coming to the group. They are learning new things, and growing vegetables. They share this learning with their husbands, mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, so that they do not create barriers.”  
– MCHN group, Uttar Horishshor, Rangpur

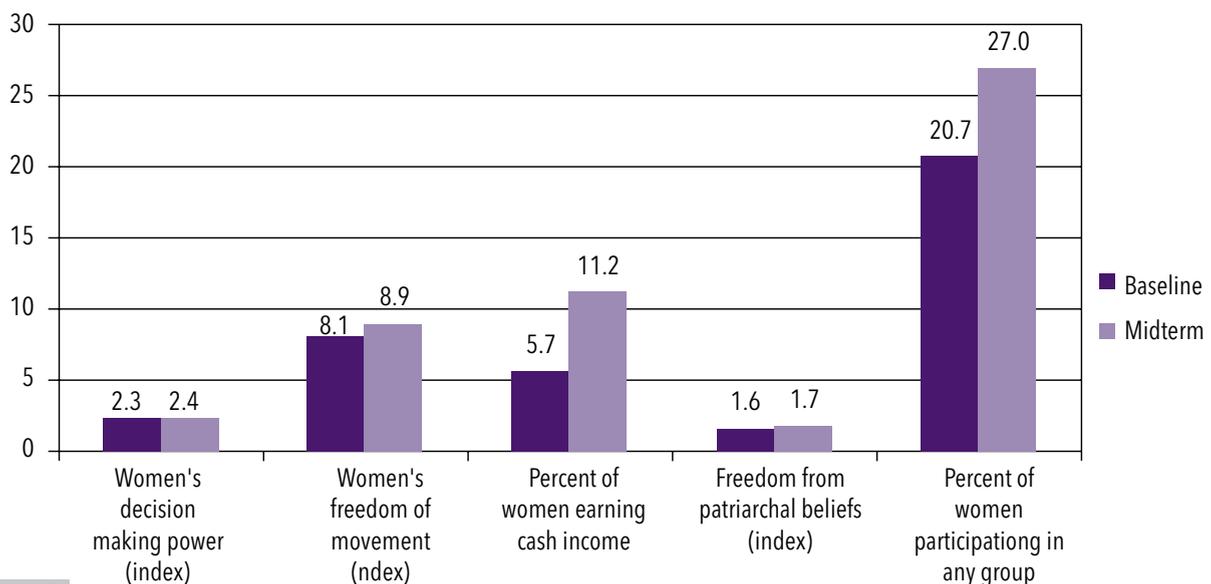


Figure 4

# CHANGING LIVES

## Homestead Vegetable Gardening



Photo © Asafuzzama/CARE

Sultana Rowshanara, 35, lives in Ukhiar Ghat Village near Cox's Bazar. She has four children, one of whom has speech and hearing disabilities, and her husband works in a tobacco factory as a laborer. Before participating in the SHOUHARDO II Program, Rowshanara sold vegetables, which only provided her with a limited monthly income of BDT 700 - 800 (or USD 10).

In 2011, Rowshanara enrolled as a beneficiary in the SHOUHARDO II Program. She received CHD training and 'input support', including a range of seeds, which allowed her to plant a small plot of land and start her new income-generating activities. After the initial cultivation she was able to make a small income of BDT 1,500 (or USD 20).

In the next phase of the program, she received four chickens, as well as some additional vegetable seeds (bottle gourd, pumpkin, red amaranth and bitter gourd). In addition she decided to plant turmeric, chili, jute leaves, bindweed, and okra based on her own initiative. After the harvest, she was able to generate a net income of BDT 25,100 (or USD 300). From this production cycle she has preserved seeds of turmeric, pumpkin, red amaranth, bottle gourd and ridge gourd to be used for plantation in the next cycle.

As a result of her improving income levels, Rowshanara was able to foster some important changes in her household. Utilizing her initial income (from the sale of her vegetable crops and income from a cow she already owned), as well as a micro-credit loan of BDT 10,000 (or USD 128), she bought 0.6 acres of land and leased another 1.2 acres of land for crop cultivation. These crops are exclusively planted for her own consumption.

SHOUHARDO II has been supporting processes to economically empower the poor and marginalized within target communities. CHD is a holistic approach to livelihood development, engaging with vegetable gardening, plantations and poultry. SHOUHARDO II's CHD program ensures maximum production around the year through the optimal use of open space surrounding homesteads and successful environmental exchange management techniques.

In the 2012-13 financial year, SHOUHARDO II provided support to 159,100 beneficiaries through various mechanisms, including training on comprehensive homestead gardening and new technologies on cultivation and water - saving technology, as well as providing input support, such as improved variety crop seeds, fruit saplings, and fishing nets.

115,499 of these CHD households include women beneficiaries. Despite the fact that many of these women do not live in EKATA villages (only 6,278 beneficiaries participate in both CHD and EKATA parts of the SHOUHARDO II Program), this economic empowerment alone has fostered women's confidence, mobility and decision - making power.

With the support of CARE's VDC, she was able to enroll her eldest child in a program for disabled children and access disability benefit (BDT 12,000 or USD 154). She initially used this money to buy a cow, which produced a calf. For the last 6 months, she has been selling 1/2 kg of milk at the rate of BDT 60 (or USD 0.77) per kg, which compliments her monthly income by another BDT 900 (or USD 11).

These training and input interventions make a significant contribution to food availability and accessibility through households' own production and increased income. Vegetables grown in individual's homestead have positively contributed to household nutrition, particularly among women and children.

Sultana's life has changed a lot. Her decision making and mobility has increased. She travels to the UP

office whenever she needs to, where she consults the Chairman and members by herself. She hires laborers to help her with crop cultivation and now produces crops herself, rather than selling them.

**“ SHOUHARDO has brought a lot of changes to my life. I have learnt many useful things. Now I can teach constructive and productive things related to agricultural production to others. There are 11 CHD beneficiaries in this village and out of them, 10 are women. They come to me for suggestions. People honor and admire my success.”**

**- Sultana Rowshanara**



Photo © Saifuddin Ahmed/CARE

## THE GENERATIONAL CHANGE MODEL

The generational change model that underpins SHOUHARDO II has its roots in more than fifteen years of CARE Bangladesh's work in addressing the underlying causes of violence against women. A key turning point in CARE's work was reached in the mid - 2000s, when the organization undertook an analytical study to understand these underlying causes.

The chief conclusion reached was that, 'the basic cause of violence is rooted in the gender ideology which promotes male dominance and superiority and women's subordination and subservience.'<sup>[11]</sup> This ideology of women's inferiority begins from an early age, when young girls are often treated unequally to boys, including being fed less. It is perpetuated further when girls are pulled out of school and married young, and reinforced with dowry practices, entrenching a relationship of inequality and subservience between a woman and her husband's family.

11 Huq, N., & Hassan, S. 2005.

## New beginnings for adolescent girls

“My education was stopped by my parents. I was not able to go anywhere. After coming to EKATA I understood that my decision should also be valued. My father did not like the idea. He was made to understand by VDC and EKATA members.”

- A 19-year-old girl speaking in a VDC and EKATA meeting, Bishnupur, Rangpur

“We shall teach our children about health, will raise them properly through education, and make them aware so that men and women can work together.”

- Adolescent girl, EKATA meeting, Halidakanda, Dharmapasha

“Now we are united, and can move forward.”

Adolescent girl, EKATA meeting, Rangikhali, Teknaf

These practices are now illegal, though observance of the law, especially regarding dowry, remains limited. The government has raised its own campaign to halt early marriage practices. Girls require a birth certificate proving they are 18 years or older to be allowed to marry, and several UP Chairmen speaking with CARE Bangladesh staff reported that they will not issue such birth certificates if they believe the girl not to be 18 (since many parents had not obtained these at birth, another sign of girls' inequality). Such perceptually based decision making is of course open to abuse. This is where the advocacy of the EKATA and VDC groups to halt early marriage is important. One group of women in Rangpur District said that most of them had been married young, but none of the adolescent members of the group had yet done so. Girls, with the support of other members in the group, were now less afraid to tell their parents that they wanted to finish their schooling

and not be married before they were 18 years old. In cases where girls had left school earlier, they were now returning.

Naturally, many challenges remain, as patriarchal practices remain deeply entrenched. Even returning to school is not easy for adolescent girls. For instance, as many have not passed their Grade 5 exams, it is difficult for them to return to state schools.

Dowry practices are also yet to change more than marginally. Cash and gifts are both commonly given. While there has been some reduction in the giving of cash in SHOUHARDO II sites, there has not been an equivalent change for the giving of gifts, even though gifts worth more than BDT 500 (or USD 6.40) are also illegal.

The generational change model offers much promise, but it needs further strengthening and consolidation. In particular, while SHOUHARDO II's EKATA groups contain adult women, they do not always include the influential older generation of mothers and mothers in law.

Some women in the SHOUHARDO II groups have become members of Standing Committees of UP or members of other committees (for example, School Management Committees and Project Implementation Committees). This increasing social and political representation of women is critical to achieving sustained campaigning against the practices that initiate and perpetuate the inequality of women. The extraordinary degree of change that has occurred within the last generation of women, following Bangladesh's independence, has already been mentioned. The goal for the next generation should be to entrench the constitutional rights of women as equal citizens much

more fundamentally into cultural perceptions and practices.

A further key component of this model is the engagement of men and adolescent boys. Courtyard meetings are held to more broadly engage men and women who are not members of SHOUHARDO groups and in schools boys also receive some information on women's and girls' rights, such as being educated about practices like 'eve teasing', which one EKATA group said tended to be carried out by boys from wealthier families against girls from poorer ones. There is a healthy dialogue taking place within VDCs the male members play a highly supportive role; however, it is also important to reach other influential men within the community – UP members, teachers, *shaliskers* (customary arbitrators) and other local elites all act as the gatekeepers to patriarchal social practices, and thus influencing these leaders is critical.



Photo © CARE

BRINGING CHANGES TO THE LIVES OF OTHERS

A role model for

# women's empowerment



Photo © Saifuddin Ahmed/CARE

“ I never thought that I could contribute to the development of my village being a woman. EKATA training has boosted my confidence and helped me to learn a lot. It is a great achievement to receive the 'Joyeeta' Award. ”

-Taslima Akhter

Taslina Akhter, 25, is a resident of Holdikanda Village of Dharmapasha Upazila of Sunamganj. Taslima's contribution to social development was recognized by the Bangladesh Government and she was awarded a 'Joyeeta' award in 2013, which recognizes women for their extraordinary contribution in different areas of development in society.

In 2011, Taslima became the Chairperson of her local VDC, which is responsible for directing and managing the SHOUHARDO II development activities at the village level. She was selected as the Chairperson, because of her pro - activeness in the community and her eagerness to help those in need around her.

Taslina was so passionate about the importance of women's empowerment issues that in 2013 she decided to become an EKATA volunteer so that she could help the women in her community. As part of her role with the EKATA group, the SHOUHARDO II Program facilitated leadership and citizenship training for Taslima, where she learned about her local government (district level) and the services they can offer to her community. With the help of SHOUHARDO II, she then became an active member of the NNPC which helps to stop violence against women and girls in their local government area.

Being an EKATA member and VDC Chairman, Taslima always played a progressive and leading role in stopping violence against women. Whenever she heard of any incidents, she personally went to help those families in need. In recognition of the role she played in doing this, Taslima was then offered a position on the local government committee.

**The 'Joyeeta' award is an honor for the women for their extraordinary contribution in different areas of development in society in five categories:**

- 1. Economic success**
- 2. Education and employment**
- 3. Successful mother**
- 4. Prevention of repression and**
- 5. Social development.**

**The goal of the award is to inspire and stimulate the women to continue their contribution to development.**

In this role she worked hard to achieve many things to help the people in her community:

- She encouraged women to take part in training that would help them create income generating activities such as a tailoring course.
- She played a role in encouraging villagers to vaccinate their animals in order to mitigate loss of income due to animal illness.
- She worked hard to rally for the registration of the EKATA group with the Women Affairs Department, which now means they have access to financial assistance from the government to allow them to continue their community work.
- Recognizing the importance of readily available healthcare for her community, Taslima worked with senior officials of her local government to re-open a community clinic, which means that the villagers now have access to healthcare locally rather than having to make long journeys to the nearest available services.
- Learning the importance of hygiene through education with the EKATA group, Taslima learned about the importance of handling latrines (communal toilets) correctly to reduce the spread of diseases. She visited households, going from door to door to educate people and as a consequence now there is not a single open latrine in her village.
- Recognizing the importance of education and the fact that the dropout rate for young girls in school is high, Taslima re-enrolled three girls in the primary school and is working to convince the parents of two others girls to re-admit them to high school. She is also working with local government officials to try to get free readmission for the girls for families that can't afford it.

Noticing her contribution to social development, senior government officials selected Taslima for a '*Joyeeta*' award on December 9, 2013 during a program which observed Begum Rokeya Day and International Women Repression Prevention week 2013. This is a prestigious new award and Taslima felt honored to receive it.

## HEALTH AND NUTRITION



Photo © Asafuzzaman/CARE

In the first SHOUHARDO Program, CARE has achieved a remarkable reduction of child stunting levels, in the order of 4.5% per year for children aged 6 - 24 months. In looking at the variables that played a role in this,

one analysis concluded that 'the project's women's empowerment interventions were found to have a strong independent impact on stunting.'<sup>[12]</sup> Where households had participated in both MCHN and

<sup>12</sup> Smith, L., Kahn, F., Frankenberger, T. & Wadud, A. 2011.

women's empowerment interventions, the effect was found to be even greater.

SHOUHARDO II has been able to maintain a positive trend in the reduction of child malnutrition. At the mid-point of the program, children under five years of age have experienced significant reductions in all measures of malnutrition – stunting, wasting and underweight. A 9% reduction in moderate stunting

(chronic malnutrition), 4.5 points per year, is positive. Data indicates that children under the age of two have also experienced reductions in stunting and wasting; however, this result was weaker than for the under five group (and indeed, not statistically significant). However, the strong reductions in wasting from the baseline to the midline of 18.2% to 11.7% amongst all children under two is a significant achievement of SHOUHARDO II thus far.

### The success of the first SHOUHARDO Program

During the first phase of implementation the Program, SHOUHARDO demonstrated a tremendous success on reducing 'stunting' and 'underweight'. It managed to bring down stunting from a baseline of 56.1% to 40.4% – a reduction of 28% or 4.5 percentage points per annum in its working area. A paper titled 'Admissible Evidence in the Court of Development Evaluation? The Impact of CARE's SHOUHARDO Project on Child Stunting in Bangladesh', published in the IDS Working Paper and World Development, has not only helped to earn worldwide recognition of the success of SHOUHARDO but also was an inspiration for the implementation of SHOUHARDO II.

#### WHAT CAUSED THE REDUCTION IN STUNTING?

Impact of Interventions on their Own and Together

Researchers from the first SHOUHARDO Program found that combining other interventions with efforts to improve maternal and child health and nutrition (MCHN) produced big results. And no single intervention reduced child stunting more than women's empowerment.

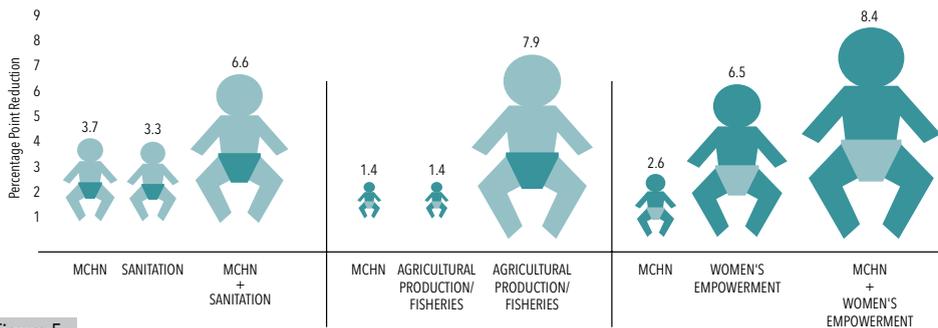


Figure 5

# IMPROVING HEALTH AND NUTRITION

## A Unique Approach to Reduce Malnutrition

“ I have received the supplementary food ration during my pregnancy and it is still continuing. I get the benefit ... I have given birth to a healthy baby. ”

- Jahanara Begum



Photo © Asafuzzaman/CARE

Jahanara Begum, 30, is from Rangikhali Village of Teknaf Upazila. Her husband is a day laborer, part - time lease cropper and a beneficiary under the Core Occupational Group (COG - livelihoods component) of the SHOUHARDO II Program. During the third month of Jahanara's pregnancy, a health volunteer from CARE's partner NGO visited and enlisted her as an eligible recipient for supplementary food support (wheat, oil and peas). The supplementary food has helped her to pass her pregnancy without complications.

Other than being a food ration recipient, Jahanara also attends the court yard sessions arranged by the Community Health Volunteers, which encourage her to go for regular check - ups, take enough rest and eat adequate meals. Previously, she was not familiar with these practices and lacked adequate awareness. These contributed in a better

delivery and a healthy baby for Jahanara. After an institutional delivery, now she takes her baby to the Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) sessions to keep track of his weight and to ensure proper growth.

The SHOUHARDO II Program also supported Jahanara in accessing a proper sanitation system in her house. She learned about the necessity during awareness sessions and subsequently set - up a hygienic latrine at her home.

**SHOUHARDO II promotes Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices, which are essential for the nutrition, growth, development and survival of infants and young children. The Program is continuing the MCHN model of providing supplementary nutrition support to pregnant and lactating PEP women, as this has proved effective in the Bangladesh context. It is also giving food to 9,876 non-PEP pregnant and lactating women with children under the age of 2 years through the PM2A (Preventing Malnutrition in Children Under Two) approach. A comparative study of these two approaches is being conducted in the field.**

**In addition to the monthly rations provided, pregnant and lactating mothers are also provided with awareness-raising sessions and skill development training. Community Health Volunteers identify children and mothers at health risk through GMP sessions and, depending on the child's condition, refer these mothers and children to local surrounding health service centers. The GMP sessions also offer the opportunity to raise awareness among these mothers on appropriate caring and feeding practices and other issues to ensure their child is growing appropriately.**

## REFLECTIONS: THE FUTURE FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN BANGLADESH

The strength of SHOUHARDO II's women's empowerment strategy lies in its generational change model. While there is much that remains to be achieved, in the last generation there have nevertheless been sweeping changes in the lives and status of women and girl children in Bangladesh.

In their comparison of the relative status of women in India and Bangladesh, Dreze and Sen place considerable importance in their argument as to why women in Bangladesh are in a better position than their neighbors. They emphasize the importance that has been placed on ensuring girls have equitable access at least to primary education primary health care. For example, Bangladesh's birth rate has reduced dramatically from around 7 children per woman in the 1970s to 4.5 in 1990 and 2.2 in 2011, only marginally above the population replacement rate of 2.1. This is because Bangladeshi women have become empowered with regard to family planning measures.<sup>[13]</sup>

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13 Dreze, J. & Sen, A. 2013, p. 64.



Photo © Asafuzzaman/CARE

Thus although patriarchal practices retain their prevalence across the country, they are not as unremittingly dominant as they are, for instance, in the north and west of India. Building on this emerging trend of women's empowerment in Bangladesh, SHOUHARDO in both its phases has made significant strides in improving the nutritional status of young children and the food security of the whole household. Since much of this achievement has occurred because of the greater role women have been able to play in their households, logically the next step of this process is the fuller liberation of women – and men – from the constraints and chains of patriarchy. To offer a very specific example, the increase of women's productive potential requires women to have greater access to productive assets, as per the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index. Although SHOUHARDO II has helped women with access to livestock, the big stride forward will be for women to gain greater access to and control over land, a resource still controlled almost entirely by men. Learning from SHOUHARDO's successes also shows that women's voices need to be even louder than they have become: there is a demand for greater women's leadership at the community level. To achieve this, programs like SHOUHARDO will need to assist women in organizing events that develop public speaking and advocacy skills, as well as provide them with stronger links to supportive networks and allies, including men.

There are warnings too. Rural women's empowerment in Bangladesh has been largely functional. It has led to the enhanced livelihood security of their families and the wellbeing of their children, to the degree that women's mobility and 'empowerment' is tolerated in

Bangladeshi society, as long as it will be beneficial for the families. For example, women working in NGOs often travel for field visits, which are acceptable to husbands and in-laws, as they are earning money which contributes to their families. However, if a woman wants to visit friends or go somewhere just to relax, the trip will not be permitted in the majority of the cases. Women, of course, know that this kind of empowerment is limited and merely instrumental, but often feel unable to see the potential for change. Yet it is important for the future of women, and the country, that this possibility is opened up and all women develop the confidence and capacity to aspire to a vision of women's empowerment. The role of projects such as SHOUHARDO is to strengthen and facilitate women's engagement with the root causes of this desire for change.

A patriarchal culture is alive and well in Bangladesh and there are many remaining limitations for women. The country is beset by governance and corruption issues, and without further amplification of women's voices, it will remain difficult for the poor and extreme poor to fully escape the poverty trap. Yet even in the most conservative parts of SHOUHARDO II's working areas, beneficiaries are aspiring to a better future.

Since introducing universal primary education for women, many people in Bangladeshi society would have been satisfied if girls were simply educated enough to become good wives and mothers, but some women have nevertheless transcended these boundaries and dreamt of a different life. Many women have joined the workforce, for instance in the garment factories, but also even in more professional jobs.

Often they take these jobs out of economic necessity, but then begin to experience a life that was not known to them before, which changes their perceptions of themselves as women. Some begin to understand the limitations imposed on them by patriarchal society and come to view themselves as truly equal with men. This full journey towards equality for men and women

in Bangladesh is unlikely to be achieved in the life-time of today's adults, but for adolescents like Selma, the self-awareness and the beginning of the journey to be respected as equal human beings is critical to their ongoing pursuit of this vision. A journey, it should be noted, that is enshrined in the Bangladeshi constitution.

Photo © Asafuzzaman/CARE





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## GASHTOLAGHAT EKATA Group

An EKATA group is still going strong four years after the end of the Program

A recent evaluation by USAID noted:

“... the continuing impact of EKATA could be seen in 94% of respondents reporting a significant reduction in violence against women and a majority agreeing that to enhance women’s decision making power they believe women should have incomes, at least for the sake of children and should have opportunities equal to those of men.”<sup>[14]</sup>

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14 USAID, 2014

One of the EKATA groups of the first SHOUHARDO Program has had such an impact on its community that it is still continuing, even though phase 1 of the program came to an end in 2010. Formed in March 2007, the Gashtolaghat EKATA group has been working for the last seven years, located in Amlapara slum under Bhairab Paurosabha, Bhairab, Kishoreganj. As part of the group, women of the Gashtolaghat slum realized that they had the power to break the culture of oppression against women and they were able to face barriers like lack of decision-making, power imbalances, violence against women and girls, early marriage and lack of education.

**“We feel proud of our unity and cohesion as a group and our work that is accepted by our community.”**

**- Abuli Begum, EKATA member**

When the group first formed they faced many barriers. There was a time when EKATA members were considered anti-religious and women of bad characters. The local municipality members (local council), religious leaders and sometimes even the fellow women in the slum made their work difficult, which meant it was hard to carry out their EKATA sessions properly. Service providers such as the local municipality did not listen to their needs and often refused to assist them. The EKATA members were often victims of ‘eve-teasing’ but despite the difficulties and challenges they faced, the group members pushed

through and carried on with their work. The group succeeded in raising women's basic literacy, regained conjugal rights as human beings, increased the bargaining power of women and established relations with the UP, upazila, and various government and non-government organizations. They successfully stopped three early marriages, conducted three dowry - free marriages and regained *Den Mohr* (money paid by the groom to the bride in Muslim marriages) of BDT 6000 (or USD 76.9).

In 2010, the first SHOUHARDO Program came to an end as planned and the EKATA volunteers started to leave the group. However the group members started to realize the huge power they had as a group, and if they stopped now, all their efforts would go to waste and their situation would return to how it was before the intervention. Sonia, Rawson, Ara, Zahanara and Abuli were active members of the EKATA group, they worked together with the other EKATA members and selected Rawson to conduct the EKATA sessions. The group decided to set up a savings account to try and cover their expenses, however it was difficult to save adequate funds, so they started seeking cooperation and assistance from government departments such as their local municipality and the Slum Development Committee. The group normally conducted their business in an open space, so they tried to find a permanent room to work from. Fortunately, one of the EKATA members had a spare room for them to use. Once the group were set up and were stable without SHOUHARDO facilitation, they decided to use their own funds and apply for registration which would give them recognition from the government. Once they were registered, they were then able to apply for

support from government departments, such as the Department of Women Affairs, the District Information Office, the District Primary Education Office, the Social Welfare Department and the Youth Development Department. Now the group participates in *Salish* (local arbitration) arranged by the community which in the past would have rarely happened, if at all. They regularly communicate with many different government committees and are active members of the local government committee for their area.

The EKATA members have achieved many milestones, establishing networks with local and national level organizations. Recently, the EKATA group jointly observed Rokaya Day and International Women's Day with the Women Affairs Department at the local district level. Their group has now been so widely accepted that they are a constant inspiration for the entire community in the Gashtolaghat slum. The community often seek support from the EKATA group for different social issues, with the respect for their group increasing in not only households, but across their society and in public forums.

When the group first set out, they concentrated mainly on women's rights, however now they have advanced to also focus on other social issues, such as

the maintenance of roads and ensuring that the slum dwellers have access to basic utilities such as a gas line, an electric pole, a tube well and local drainage. They continued the slum cleanliness initiatives that they started during the SHOUHARDO Program and also initiated some Income Generating Activities (IGA) training to help the slum dwellers earn their own income in areas such as *karchupi* (hand embroidery) and cow, duck, hen and sheep rearing. The group have also been working on trying to reduce the number of young girls who drop out of primary school, encouraging them to continue with their education. Even the non-EKATA women and girls also appreciate the role of the EKATA group because of the positive impact that the group have had on changing aspects of their lives. The women and girls now experience less eve-teasing and sexual harassment. The group even managed to rescue some children from entering early marriage and sent them back to school.

The courage, dynamism, and energy with which the Gashtolaghat EKATA group has sustained itself as an independent institution are a valuable learning model for the EKATA groups in the SHOUHARDO II Program, leading to greater women's empowerment.

## Selma's Dream

Since Selma became an EKATA volunteer in her village of Hnila, Teknaf, her thinking has changed a great deal.

Due to her family's financial problems, her mother did not want her to sit for the exams that would allow her to continue her education after Grade 12. But Selma was determined to stay at school. She discussed her situation with the madrasa Principal and had her exam fees discounted so she was able to stay.

Since becoming an EKATA volunteer and helping to solve problems in the village, her status in the community has increased. She has also been able to make a stand against dowries within her own family. When her brother was married, she rejected the offer of a dowry, including all gifts worth more than BDT 500. She said that the family would continue this approach in her own marriage: as they did not receive a dowry for her

brother's marriage, they would not give one for hers.

In the future, Selma plans to study for a Masters degree in Cox's Bazar. She wants to get married after completing her education, but as she is already 18, and has successfully delayed her marriage, she will agree to marry if there is someone suitable. Even when married, she wants to have a job so that she will be able to utilize her education. She also wants to continue the work she has done with EKATA: her ideal job would involve working with women.

Selma's dream articulates the potential that the work of EKATA groups has to break open existing cultural boundaries. While she will no doubt face challenges once she does marry, her husband will be entering a relationship – without a dowry – that will be conducted on much more equal terms.

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## List of Acronyms

BDT	: Bangladeshi Taka
CHD	: Comprehensive Homestead Development
COG	: Core Occupational Groups
ECCD	: Early Childhood Care and Development
EKATA	: Education, Knowledge and Transformative Action
EVAW	: Ending Violence Against Women
GMP	: Growth Monitoring and Promotion
IFPRI	: International Food Policy Research Institute
IYCF	: Infant and Young Child Feeding
MCHN	: Maternal Child Health and Nutrition
MYAP	: Multi Year Assistance Program
NGO	: Non Government Organization
NNPC	: Nari Nirjaton Protirodh Committee
PEP	: Poor and Extreme Poor
PM2A	: Preventing Malnutrition in Children Under 2 Approach (nutrition support for PEP and non-PEP pregnant and lactating women)
SHOUHARDO	: Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities
UP	: Union Parishad
USAID	: United States Agency for International Development
USD	: US Dollars
VAW	: Violence Against Women
VDC	: Village Development Committee





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