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PARTICIPANT BASED SURVEY (PaBS) 2023

Final Report



CARE BANGLADESH
Strengthening Household Ability to Respond
to Development Opportunities III Plus Activity
(SHOUHARDO III Plus)



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DMA Team



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List of Acronyms

ANC	Ante-Natal Care
BSP	Blue Star Provider
CO	Collector (Produce)
COG	Core Operational Group
FFH	Fish Fry Hawker
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FY	Fiscal Year
GBV	Gender Base Violence
HA	Health Agent(s) – includes PCSBA and BSP LSPs
HA	Health Agents - PCSBA and BSP are collectively referred to as HA
HH	Household
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IGA	Income Generating Activity
IR	Intermediate Result
KII	Key Informant Interview
LSP	Local Service Provider
MCHN	Mother and Child Health and Nutrition
MDD	Minimum Dietary Diversity
MMF	Minimum Meal Frequency
NGO	Non-Government Organization
PaBS	Participants Based Survey
PCSBA	Private Community Skilled Birth Attendants
PEP	Poor and Extreme Poor
SA	Seed Agent
SHOUHARDO III Plus	Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities III Plus
SS	Shanchay Sathi/Village Agent (VSLA)
UP	Union Parishad
USG	United States Government
VDC	Village Development Committee
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
VX	Vaccinator (Livestock)
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO) III Plus is a two-year Activity (2022-2024) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Activity aims to improve food security, resilience, and income for 168,521 Poor and Extreme Poor (PEP) households in the remote Char and Haor regions of Bangladesh. The Activity focuses on income diversification, sustainable agriculture, market access, financial services, and nutrition. It also emphasizes gender equity, governance, disaster risk reduction, environmental considerations, and private sector engagement to maximize its impact. This includes the continuation of engaging and linking the program-facilitated Local Service Providers (LSP) with the government and private sector, as well as promoting increased consumption of nutritious foods and micro-nutrients for children under five years of age, pregnant and lactating women, and adolescent girls. Project intervention areas include 4 districts (Kurigram, Gaibandha, Shiraiganj and Jamalpur) in Char region and 4 districts (Netrokona, Kishoreganj, Habiganj and Sunamganj) in Haor region.

The resilience focused single goal-level complex composite index indicator RESIL-a Ability to recover from 16 types of shocks and stresses [ZOI-level] reached its target value of 5 (out of a maximum of 6). This good result is supported by a Bonding Social Capital¹ Index of 83.5% and a Bridging Social Capital² Index of 70.6%. The increasing level of women empowerment is a significant factor for both sub-indices and the increase in men's task sharing with women assists with the bonding sub-index and the better level of accessing public and private external agents and VSLAs contribute to the bridging sub-index.

The following table of key indicators reveals an overall good achievement rate, considering the ongoing COVID recovery phase, the negative impact of price increases and weather events. In the area of nutrition of children under two, there is an unexplained poor performance.

Table 1: Key achievements of the performance indicators

Ind. #	Indicator Description	Target FY23	Result FY23 (Weighted)	% of Target Achieved
Goal: Improved gender equitable food and nutrition security and resilience of the vulnerable people living in the Char and Haor in Bangladesh by 2024				
1	RESIL-a Ability to recover from shocks and stresses index [ZOI-level]	5	4.9	98.8
Intermediate Result 1: Increased equitable access to income for both women and men, and nutritious food for men, women, boys, and girls				
2	EG.3-10,-11,-12 Yield of targeted agricultural commodities among program participants with USG assistance [IM-level]			
	Maize	8.0	8.8	109.7
	Chili	8.2	8.6	105.0
	Sweet gourd	17.7	21.0	118.6
	Rice	5.7	5.1	90.8
	Vegetables	16.1	18.9	117.3
	Goat (live)	9.3	10.1	108.9
	Duck	1.3	1.3	103.9
3	EG.3.2-26 Value of annual sales of producers and firms receiving USG assistance [IM-level]			
	Maize	7,324,025	7,520,655	102.6

¹ Bonding social capital refers to the extent to which individuals or households can rely on and receive support from their community for financial or food support during difficult times, e.g., loss of a family member, loss of income, hunger, drought, flood, conflict or similar events.

² Bridging social capital, on the other hand, pertains to the extent to which individuals or households can access support from outside of the community for financial or food support during difficult times, e.g., loss of a family member, loss of income, hunger, drought, flood, conflict or similar events.



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	Chili	1,368,670	1,472,929	107.6
	Sweet gourd	413,065	373,030	90.3
	Rice	17,194,306	20,885,747	121.5
	Vegetables	1,600,940	3,190,294	199.3
	Goat (live)	14,999,040	17,556,590	117.0
	Duck	709,008	922,894	130.2
4	EG.3.2-24: Number of individuals in the agriculture and food system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with USG assistance [activity/implementing mechanism (IM) level]	139,879	133,282	95.3
5	EG.3.2-25 Number of hectares under improved management practices or technologies with USG assistance [IM-level]	15,583	17,621	113.1
6	Custom : Mean decision making score (Index) for woman in household level	38.5	45.5	118.1
7	Custom: Percentage of households reported increased income	40.0	42.7	106.8
8	Custom : Percentage of individuals income source increased	25	21.0	84.0
9	Custom: Percentage of poor & extreme poor (PEP) households accessing markets	85.0	80.7	94.9
10	Custom : Percentage of people received service from USG supported Local Service Providers	97.5	68.6	70.3
11	Custom: Percentage of farmers who report access to market information in last 12 months	77.0	75.5	98.1
Intermediate Result 2: Improved and sustained nutritional status of children under five years of age, pregnant, and lactating women and adolescent girls				
12	HL.9.1-d Percent of women of reproductive age consuming a diet of minimum diversity [ZOI-level]	55	49.8	90.6
13	Custom : Percentage of pregnant women who received pregnancy care support (day-time rest, extra food) during pregnancy period	84.5	76.9	91.0
14	Custom : Percentage of participants who reported increased access to targeted public services	95	89.9	94.6
Other performance areas				
	Percentage of live births receiving at least four antenatal care (ANC) visits during pregnancy	NA	44	NA
	Prevalence of children 6–23 months receiving a minimum dietary diversity	NA	52	NA
	Prevalence of children 6–23 months receiving a minimum meal frequency	NA	33	NA
	Percent of households using an improved drinking water source	NA	100	NA
	Percentage of program participants aware of cost and consequences of Gender Based Violence	NA	98	NA
	Percent of married women whose husbands help with household tasks.	NA	78	NA
	Percent of Agriculture participants apply safety measures during pesticides use	NA	81	NA

Intermediate Result Area (IR) 1: Increased equitable access to income for both women and men, and nutritious food for men, women, boys, and girls

The farming and livelihoods achievements for this IR are very good with most indicators in the 90% to 199% range (see table above). Contributing factors to these high achievements are the many years of SHOUHARDO activities and the on-going local supportive systems such as the LSPs and the improved access to information, products and services from the public and private sectors. Of particular interest are the 52-54% of HH selling from home or at local markets, which is an advantage to women and likely a reflection of Collector LSP activity.

The two lower achievements are for increasing income sources (84%) and people receiving service from LSPs (70%). Increasing sources of income in a largely agrarian environment is difficult and the highest was for livestock production (26%) where SHOUHARDO III Plus interventions have been instrumental. Incidentally, small livestock production and sales is particularly beneficial to women. The 70% reported achievement for people (both PEP and Non-PEP) who received services from the seven types of local service providers (LSPs) during the last 12 months can be partially explained by the facts that many Non-PEP respondents had little knowledge of LSPs, although in reality they had used them without knowing they were LSPs and that not all LSP services are offered across all locations.

Intermediate Result 2: Improved and sustained nutritional status of children under five years of age, pregnant, and lactating women and adolescent girls

Achievements are more varied for this IR with many in the 90-100% range. The higher achievements include women of reproductive age (15-49 years) who consumed a diet of minimum diversity (91%); pregnant women who received pregnancy care support from their families (91%); participants' access to targeted public services for agriculture and nutrition only (95%).

In the supplementary achievements of program activities, there are three low scores for the Prevalence of children 6–23 months receiving a Minimum Dietary Diversity (52%) and a Minimum Meal Frequency (33%), and for mothers of live births who received at least four ANC visits during pregnancy (44%).

The qualitative survey does not reveal clearly why these three indicators are so low, though there is a likely contribution of the price increases which caused 80% of HH to adopt coping mechanisms that negatively affect nutrition (reducing food purchases 49%, changing food habits 32%, fewer meals 27%, consuming wild foods 19%). It seems the children suffer more than the adults. It is likely that weather events and remoteness prevented women to receive the four ANC visits.

Cross-cutting (CC) areas: resilience, gender integration, women's empowerment and equitable provision of public services

CCI – Resilience

The achievements for resilience have been severely challenged by price increases as 98% of HH reported a 36% increase of household's food expenses in the past 6 months and the majority reported to reducing food quantities and quality and curtailing other expenses (health, education, housing).

Paradoxically, the Ability to Recover from Shocks and Stresses is high (5 out of 6) and the great majority of PEP HH report having a better quality of life now. This may be due in part to 46% of HH accessing loans, primarily from MFIs (81%, with an average of 1.2 of value 55,000BDT, primarily for consumptive use (57%) and 20% for productive use (Farming and IGA)) and also feeling better supported and connected in their communities.



CC2 - Women's empowerment and gender equity

The achievements are generally good and numbers do not tell the whole story. By all accounts SHOUHARDO III Plus and LSPs have done very well to empower women and girls and promote gender equity. LSPs make a special effort to reach women, especially if their shops are in the middle of the market, where women have access difficulties. Adolescent girls now receive better health service and are sometimes organized in Adolescent Girls' groups.

98% of households were aware of the cost and consequences of GBV, ranging from 72% for financial costs to 18% for societal costs. 64% of households mentioned that women need permission to visit outside the house, ranging from 13% to go to a local shop to 51% for local clubs and flood shelters. 78% households mentioned that men participated in tasks with women, ranging from 31% for cleaning the house to 56% for livestock rearing.

An achievement of 118% for the decision-making index for women, measuring active participation of women in 16 categories with a median of 57%, ranging between 40% for participation in salish (local arbitration) and 79% for buying small food items, groceries and toiletries. There seem to be a scale of decreasing active participation by women as the decisions increasingly would affect the household in the future and concern external entities.

There is a reported 5.3% increase in domestic violence due to the price increase resulting in 45% of women reported facing mental/emotional/psychological abuse and 12% facing physical abuse.

CC3 – Provision and equitable utilization of public services for vulnerable people and community groups

The achievements are good with 95% of HH reporting increased access to targeted public services. 92.4% HHs reported that they can get health services from functioning health/nutrition service centers in their areas (primarily from government - 92%). Other services received: Animal health 63% (77% from LSP) and Agricultural services 44% (70% from LSP). All with a high level of satisfaction - 80 to 95%.

67% of the households received support from the government or Union Parishad, 70% received Safety Net Support, 14.1% received support from NGOs, primarily for emergency assistance. 61.8% households members were involved in formal/informal financial institutions but only 22.5% in VSLAs.

VDCs are providing a valuable service, from 10% (PEP linkage to private sector) to 34% (PEP receiving assistance and advice), and 49% for (PEP accessing UP and NBD services such as social entitlements and administrative documents). Non-PEP generally benefit more than the PEP, except for GBV referrals (5%).

LSP Service Provisioning and Sustainability

The achievements for the LSPs are very good, both for the LSPs and for their communities, and they appear sustainable, including a significant Non-PEP uptake, particularly in three districts.

More than 74% of households are aware of Vaccinators and Seed Agents but less than 6% know about the Blue Star Providers but not all LSP services are offered across all locations. This is by design, as SHOUHARDO Plus emphasizes LSP service provision in geographic locations that lack access to public services. 69% of all households received a service from LSPs in the last 12 months and more than 95% were satisfied with their service and all are willing to pay them.

Non-PEP benefitted much more from most LSP products and services due to their better economic situation, such as Vaccinators, Seed Agents, Fish Hawkers, Collectors and WASH Agents (by more than 30%).

For PEP and Non-PEP the 4 best benefits of LSP services were the same: good availability, time/energy saving, better quality of life and better knowledge.



LSPs were largely very satisfied with their activities, with their linkage to public and private entities and with their roles and respect in their communities. They are very motivated, are willing to continue their work and most earn sufficient income from their LSP and LSP-related activities.

The Sustained Resources, Capacity, Linkages, Motivation are satisfactory as are the Sustained Service Delivery, Access and Demand.

Conclusion

With regard to the four pronged SHOUHARDO III Plus Theory of Change, the Activity has done particularly well for increasing resilience and on-farm opportunities, reducing social exclusion and discriminatory gender norms, and increasing access to markets and public and private services and products. The general price increase has mitigated its effect on the nutritional status of vulnerable populations. Other than the VSLAs, its performance for improving financial systems and actors and diversifying livelihood opportunities at scale is unclear.

Key Recommendations

1. Implement a sustainable strategy to enhance LSP sustainability: a) on-going access to appropriate training at reasonable cost; b) linking LSPs with financial institutions to access credit; c) more formal LSP networking for the creation of new LSPs and improving their linkages and registration/certification with local authorities; d) replicate to other districts the processes for Non-PEP uptake of LSP services.
2. Expand LSP services where service provision is generally inadequate, particularly with female LSPs as Vaccinator for small livestock and as Health Agents.
3. Several times in the qualitative findings there are requests from PEP HH for more training in income generation activities, particularly in more remote and rural areas.
4. As the qualitative survey indicates that three districts reported significant use of LSP by Non-PEPs, enhancing LSP sustainability, SHOUHARDO III Plus could study the phenomena so as to replicate it in the other districts.
5. Implement initiatives to improve LSP use of ICT and Apps, especially by women, as the qualitative survey indicates that many LSPs are not using them.

I. INTRODUCTION

Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO) III Plus is a two-year Activity (2022-2024) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Activity aims to improve food security, resilience, and income for 168,521 Poor and Extreme Poor (PEP) households in the remote Char and Haor regions of Bangladesh. The Activity focuses on income diversification, sustainable agriculture, market access, financial services, and nutrition. It also emphasizes gender equity, governance, disaster risk reduction, environmental considerations, and private sector engagement to maximize its impact.

This includes the continuation of engaging and linking the program-facilitated Local Service Providers (LSP) with the government and private sector, as well as promoting increased consumption of nutritious foods and micro-nutrients for children under five years of age, pregnant and lactating women, and adolescent girls. The project intervention area includes 4 districts (Kurigram, Gaibandha, Shirajganj and Jamalpur) in Char region and 4 districts (Netrokona, Kishoreganj, Habiganj and Sunamganj) in Haor region.

The 2023 Participant-Based Survey (PaBS) was conducted by Data Management Aid (DMA) in September 2023 and its objectives were to measure the annual monitoring indicators results through a quantitative and a qualitative survey whose objective is:

- To generate high-quality information for measuring efficiency and effectiveness of local service provider and service provisioning system
- Triangulate the qualitative findings with quantitative data to better interpret the survey results.
- To explore some challenges and opportunities for the LSPs so that the program can have made a necessary adaptation in light of new learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

Data Management Aid was outsourced by CARE to conduct the PaBS 2023 annual survey in September 2023, with the assistance of a remote external advisor. A mixed method of quantitative and qualitative was applied and measured 14 outcome monitoring indicators against their annual targets, out of the 20 routine monitoring indicators. A total of 1,515 households were polled and 16 FGDs and 40 KIs were completed with PEP and Non-PEP respondents and Public and Private stakeholders.

After translating all the tools in Bengali, DMA conducted residential training for enumerators and supervisors. The analysis was done with both weighted and un-weighted data and finally, the weighted results were used while writing this report as per the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) guideline³. Throughout the survey process, the DMA team was fully compliant with CARE and USAID's 'do no harm' approach.

³ BHA_Emergency_ME_Guidance_February_2022.pdf



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Table 2: Annual Monitoring Indicators for the PaBS 2023

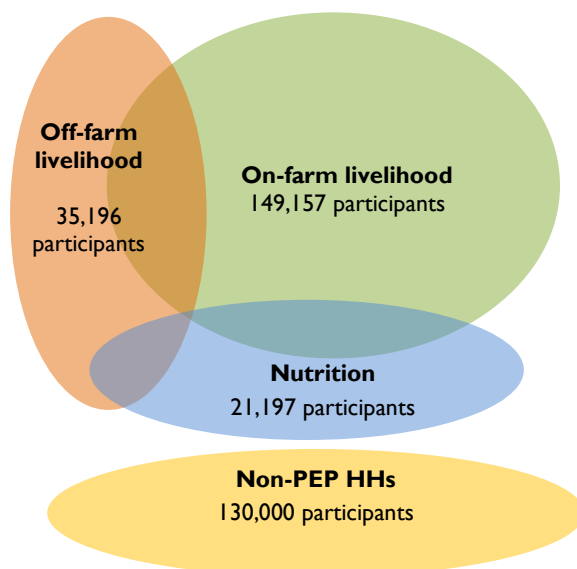
SL	Indicators	Sampling frame population for FY2023
Indicators with <u>TOTAL</u> Values		
1	EG.3.2-25: Number of hectares under improved management practices or technologies with USG assistance [IM-level]	Total 43,323 (15,419 Maize, 6,596 Chili, 4,105 Sweet Gourd and 17,203 Agri others, mainly rice and vegetables)
2	EG.3.2-24: Number of individuals in the agriculture and food system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with USG assistance [activity/implementing mechanism (IM) level] - On-Farm livelihoods	Total 149,157 (15,419 Maize, 6,596 Chili, 4,105 Sweet Gourd, 95,232 Goat and 10,602 Duck and 17,203 Agri others, mainly rice and vegetables)
3	EG.3-10-11-12: Yield of targeted agricultural commodities among program participants with USG assistance - On-Farm livelihoods	
4	EG.3.2-26: Value of annual sales of producers and firms receiving USG assistance	
Indicators with <u>PERCENT</u> Values		
5	Custom: Percentage of households reported increased income	Total 173,502
6	Custom: Percentage of individuals income source increased	On-Farm livelihoods: 149,157
7	Custom: Percentage of poor & extreme poor (PEP) households accessing markets	Off- Farm livelihoods: 35,196
8	Custom: Percentage of people received service from USG supported Local Service Providers	Total 185,566 (149,157 On-Farm + 35,196 Off- Farm livelihoods) + 21,397 Nutrition interventions participants
9	Custom: Percentage of farmers who reported to get market information in last 12 months	Total:173,502 149,157 On-Farm livelihoods 35,196 Off-Farm livelihoods
10	Custom: Percentage of participants who reported increased access to targeted public services.	
11	Custom: Percentage of pregnant women who received pregnancy care support (day-time rest, extra food) during pregnancy period	21,397 Nutrition interventions participants (Mother with children aged 0-59 months)
12	HL.9.1-d: Percentage of women of reproductive age consuming a diet of minimum diversity [ZOI-level]	
Indicators with <u>MEAN</u> Values		
13	Custom: Mean decision-making score (Index) for woman in household level	Total 185,566 (149,157 On-Farm + 35,196 Off- Farm livelihoods) + 21,397 Nutrition interventions participants
14	RESIL-a: Ability to recover from shocks and stresses index [ZOI-level]	

2.1 Sampling Frame of PaBS

SHOUHARDO III Plus does not directly implement household-level interventions but promotes service provisioning of local service providers so that households and farmers can have easy access to services and goods/products. SHOUHARDO III Plus considered SHOUHARDO III agriculture participants as a sampling frame for the PaBS.

SHOUHARDO III Plus successfully engaged with a total of 164,765 PEP households through various subgroups within the Core Operational Group (COG). The COG consisted of 149,157 farmers involved in On-Farm livelihoods, 35,196 beneficiaries engaged in Off-Farm livelihoods including VSLA, and 21,197 mothers of children aged 0-59 months who benefited from the Nutrition program. It is important to note that among the sampling frames there are significant overlaps with each other, but the Non-COG, Non-PEP, HHs sampling frame is totally separate from the other frames with no overlap.

Figure 1: PaBS Sampling Frames



Given the relative mix of programming activities and the indicators selected to monitor program progress, four major sampling frames including Non-PEP beneficiaries are sufficient to capture the information necessary to track all annual monitoring indicators in Table 3.

Table 3: Targets for FY23 beneficiaries related to the PaBS indicators are given below

Sampling Frame	Type of Beneficiary (FY 2023)	Number
Frame-1	On-farm livelihoods	149,157
Frame-2	Off-farm livelihoods	35,196
Frame-3	Nutrition Interventions for mothers of children aged 0-59 Months	21,197
Frame-4	Non-PEP Households	130,000

SAMPLING PROCEDURE: The selection of sample cluster and survey respondents was done following section 9.4.1 of the FANTA Sampling Guide for Beneficiary-Based Surveys⁴. The general steps of the Sampling Units (beneficiaries) selection and data collection process are as follow:

Selection of Cluster: 42 clusters for COG beneficiaries, 18 clusters for Off/non-farm livelihoods beneficiaries and 15 clusters for MCHN beneficiaries (mothers with children 6-23 months) were selected using the Probability Proportional to the Size (PPS) procedure. A separate 26 clusters/villages from SHOUHARDO III Plus working villages were selected using the PPS procedure for the sampling frame of non-PEP households.

Selection of Survey respondents: Survey respondents were selected using the method of Fractional Interval Systematic sampling from a comprehensive list of beneficiaries using one of two variants of an

⁴ "Participant-Based Survey Sampling Guide for Feed the Future Annual Monitoring Indicators" by Diana Maria Stukel Gregg Friedman, FTF, September 2018.

equal probability method: in each selected cluster, 15 beneficiaries were drawn randomly from the respective sampling frame.

DMA applied a participatory and consultative validation process to list the households having children 6-23 months in the MCHN sampled villages. In the sample villages, DMA staff conducted a large group discussion with members of the Village Development Committees (VDCs), where other community-level volunteers also attended. DMA staff preliminarily identified households with children under two (6-23 months) in those settings. Then, staff visited every listed household to confirm the eligibility criteria. Tablets were used for household listing. Programming the survey allowed DMA to program all the skip patterns and automate the differences between two sources of information. DMA teams then constructed the sampling frame and selected sample as per eligibility criteria to interview for the MCHN survey.

The FY23 PaBS sampling frame has been constructed from the Program MIS database system. The MIS database has been designed to identify households by beneficiary types with unique identifiers both for households and individuals in those households. Also, the non-PEP households were selected from the extension implementation areas of SHOUHARDO. The DMA Data Analyst with the help of SHOUHARDO III Plus M&E team prepared the sampling plan and sampling frame.

Sampling weights and treatment of non-response: During analysis, sampling weights have been included on the data file. The formulae used to calculate the sampling weights has been included as part of a data dictionary document. DMA made sure that standard procedures in developing sampling weights are followed according to FANTA guideline. Households' non-response adjustment was also made to the sampling weights as part of the final weighting system and described how the outliers have been addressed.

Table 4: Sample sizes for PaBS 2023

Sampling Frame	Sampling Frame	Population	Sample (adjusted)	Sample per cluster	No. of Clusters
1	COG BENEFICIARY SURVEY				
	A. On-farm livelihoods				
	1.1 Maize	15,419	105	15	7
	1.2 Chili	6,596	105	15	7
	1.3 Sweet Gourd	4,105	105	15	7
	1.4 Goat live	95,232	105	15	7
	1.5 Poultry Duck	10,602	105	15	7
	1.6 Other Agriculture (rice and vegetables)	17,203	105	15	7
	All On-farm livelihoods Farmers	149,157	630	15	42
2	Non-farm livelihoods	35,196	270	15	18
3	Nutrition (mothers of children 6-23 months)	21,397	225	15	15
4	Non-PEP Households	130,000	390	15	26
Total Sample Size			1,515	15	101

**Overlap MCHN beneficiaries with COG is excluded.*

Development of the PaBS Instruments: All the tools (quantitative and qualitative) were developed by DMA following the Performance Indicator Reference Sheet (PIRS). The tools were shared with SHOUHARDO III Plus core team members and revised as per their feedback. The final tools were translated into Bangla and approved by SHOUHARDO III Plus Team. Bangla and English questionnaires attached in Appendix B.

Selection and Training of Enumerators: 20 enumerators and 4 supervisors were employed for data collection and received a 5-day training in Rangpur that included classroom sessions, classroom

practice of data collection using electronic devices, one day field practice, debriefing session, finalization of the tablet Questionnaire and team formation.

2.2 Qualitative Study

For qualitative study, a total of 16 FGDs and 40 KIIs and 2 consultation meetings were conducted with the following target groups covering all the 8 intervention districts, i.e. 4 districts in the Char region and 4 districts in the Haor region. The samples were selected purposively to get a better insight with more contextual variability.

Table 5: Qualitative Study Sample

Method	Respondent category	Char Region	Haor Region	Total sample
FGD	PEP Participants	4 (1 FGD x 4 districts)	4 (1 FGD x 4 districts)	8
FGD	Non-PEP Participants	4 (1 FGD x 4 districts)	4 (1 FGD x 4 districts)	8
KII	Local Service Providers (LSP) I. Livestock Vaccinators II. Seed Agents III. Produce Collectors IV. Fish Fry Hawkers V. Sanchay Sathi VI. Private Community Skilled Birth Attendants (PCSBAs) VII. Blue Star Providers (BSPs)	14 (2 x 7 type LSPs)	14 (2 x 7 type LSPs)	28
KII	Public Service Providers Departments/Extension Services: 2 agriculture (UAEO and SAAO), 2 health and family planning (UH&FPO and CHCP), 3 livestock (ULO and VFF), 1 fisheries (Senior UFO)	4	4	8
KII	Private Sector (1 Animal Health and 1 Seed Company)	1	1	2
KII	Member of Village Development Committee (VDC)	1	1	2
Consultation Meetings	SHOUHARDO III Plus project partners -ESDO and DAM	1	1	2

Qualitative methods

Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted to understand the in-depth perspective of diverse groups about the access to local services, service quality, the effectiveness of service system, and the challenges and lesson learned. FGDs were organized with 8-10 homogenous sample. All the FGD participants had a common feature and FGD facilitators ensured that participants meet the desired common criterion, i.e., poor and extreme poor (PEP) participants and non-PEP participants.

Key Informant Interviews (KII) were administered with the local service providers' (LSPs), public service providers, representatives of private sector and members of village development committees (VDC).

- LSPs: seven categories of LSPs: i) Vaccinators; ii) Seed Agents; iii) Collectors; iv) Fish Fry Hawkers; v) Sanchay Sathi (VSLA); vi) Private Community Skilled Birth Attendants (PCSBAs) and vii) Blue Star Providers (BSPs).

- Public Service Providers: Included Departments/Extension Services in agriculture, livestock, fisheries and health and family planning. The Key Informants were Upazila level officers and community level service providers.
- Private Sector: Included animal health (Medical Information Officer of Popular Pharmaceuticals Ltd) and seed companies.

Consultation Meeting: In addition, two consultation meetings were held with the Implementing Partners who included ESDO in Jamalpur and DAM in Sunamganj.

Sustainability Focus Qualitative Study: The KIIs focused on LSPs sustained resources, capacity (skills and training to provide services), linkage (relationship with public and private sector), motivation, LSPs sustained service delivery (demand and monthly income), gender inclusion, challenges and support and Expectations and Recommendations for Future Improvements and Plans. The FGDs focused on peoples' sustained access to LSPs and public service providers and the challenges they faced. The consultation meetings emphasized on partners views on LSPs' work and sustainability, community demand of services and access, and challenges faced by partners during implementation of project activities,

2.3 Data quality control

There were four data collection teams where two teams comprised of six enumerators and two teams comprised of four enumerators. Each team had one supervisor/quality control officer from the contracted survey firm. The team supervisors were mainly responsible for monitoring data collection through reviewing data from the mobile device daily to ensure data quality. In addition they re-interview one household per day using tablets, based on a condensed survey limited to a subset of critical questions. Supervisors verified that non-response households were unavailable or truly opted out of participation. The team adhered to 'Do No Harm principle' and followed precautionary measures during data collection.

Field supervisors regularly collected all mobile devices from the interviewers and reviewed all household interview records, question by question. Cross-referencing of re-interview records with the original records collected by the enumerators happened at this time. Finally, field supervisors uploaded finalized data to the cloud server through a secure transmission.

The data management expert of DMA ensured correctness, completeness, and the validity of data entered in hard copy format and/or downloaded data daily from the Tablet/Cell phone and reviewed the same daily to ensure data quality. They made regular field visits during data collection to monitor the data collection process. Data Quality was a critical part of the overall survey. The DMA Data Manager downloaded data from the server and reviewed it daily to ensure data consistency/quality.

2.4 Data Management and Analysis

The preferred mode of data collection was through smartphones and tablets. Data was updated to the central server online and/or offline (with synchronization functionalities) and the dataset was converted into the SPSS database for data management and analysis. Validated data was accumulated in the main SPSS database daily.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

DMA complied to all measures to ensure safety guard of the respondents of the quantitative as well as the qualitative study in order to protect the right of the respondents.

Informed oral consent was obtained from respondents prior to conducting interview (PABS), FGD and KII. They were provided full and correct information regarding the purpose of the study, nature of information required, benefits of the study and freedom to be exercised by the respondents during the interviews and FGDs. In order to facilitate proper understanding of the respondents the consent form/statement was prepared in local languages using simple and clear statements. The interviewer

also provided necessary clarifications to questions when asked by the respondents. Regarding confidentiality, the respondents were clearly told that the information they provided during the interviews would be kept strictly confidential. Furthermore, privacy during the interview process was safeguarded. The interview was held under conditions wherein the respondents felt most comfortable in responding.

2.6 Constraints and Limitations

As the qualitative surveys were implemented concurrently with the quantitative survey, there was no opportunity to ask questions to probe some of the quantitative results as the qualitative surveys were focused to understand the perspective of diverse groups about access to local services, service quality, the effectiveness of the service system, the challenges, lessons learned and to assess overall LSP sustainability.

3. FINDINGS

Goal: Improved gender equitable food and nutrition security and resilience of the vulnerable people living in the Char and Haor in Bangladesh by 2024

RESIL-a Ability to recover from shocks and stresses index [ZOI-level]

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
5	4.9	98.8%

The Ability to Recover from Shocks and Stresses Index, as elaborated in the Performance Indicator Reference Sheet (PIRS) document, is a tool used to gauge how well households can recover from common challenges like the loss of a family member, income reductions, hunger, drought, floods, conflict, and other similar difficulties. This index is built on data related to how households coped with 16 types of shocks and stressors in the year before a survey and their outlook on being able to meet their food needs in the upcoming year. To create this index, two key questions are asked:

Firstly, respondents are asked to assess their household's current ability to meet their food needs in comparison to before. If it is better than before, it has given a score of 3. If it is the same, it receives a score of 2. If it is worse than before, it is assigned a score of 1.

Secondly, respondents are asked to predict how their household's ability to meet food needs will be in the next year compared to now with a similar scoring of 3, 2 and 1.

These two sets of responses are then combined, resulting in a single variable that can range from a minimum score of 2 to a maximum score of 6. This index provides valuable insights into how households perceive their resilience in the face of adversity and their ability to secure food for their families.

In PaBS FY23, the calculation of the resilience capacity of the participating households of SHOUHARDO III Plus in the Char and Haor region indicated an index of 4.9 which is a 98.8% achievement of the target of 5 out of an index maximum of 6, indicating that the respondents feel quite resilient. This agrees with the qualitative findings that all the PEP respondents indicated to have a better quality of life now (resilience, economic and social) and it is also supported by the Social Capital Index result below.

Index of social capital at household level

This indicator is composed of two indices to measure the ability of participant households in the target area to draw on social networks to get support to mitigate the impact of shocks and stressors on

their households and offer valuable insights into the dynamics of social capital and support networks within and beyond the community. These indices are constructed as follows:

Bonding Social Index: This index is established based on responses to two key questions. The first question assesses whether a household would seek assistance from individuals (e.g., relatives, non-relatives from the same ethnic/caste group, and non-relatives from other ethnic/caste groups) within their own community when in need of money or food. The second question examines whether the household would be willing to provide help to individuals (from the same choices) within their community.

Bridging Social Index: This index, in contrast, relies on the same questions but regarding seeking and providing assistance to agents outside of their own community.

In PaBS FY23, the achievement for social capital index was found to be 77.1%. The bonding sub-index at household level was 83.5% while the bridging sub-index was 70.6%.

The increasing level of women empowerment is a significant factor for both sub-indices and the increase in men's task sharing with women assists with the bonding sub-index and the better level of accessing public and private external agents and VSLAs contribute to the bridging sub-index.

3.1 Intermediate Result Area 1: Increased equitable access to income for both women and men, and nutritious food for men, women, boys, and girls

There is little qualitative information regarding farming activities as the qualitative survey focused on sustainability through better access to products and services through LSP and public and private entities. However, the high degree of performance of VX and SA LSP and the increased access to external public and private entities are surely significant contributing factors to the good performance of farming activities.

3.1.1 EG.3.2-24: Number of individuals in the agriculture and food system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with USG assistance [activity implementing mechanism (IM) level]

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
139,879	133,282	95.3%

This indicator measured the total number of farmers participating in the SHOUHARDO III Plus project who have applied at least three improved management practices and/or technologies promoted by the USG anywhere within the food and agriculture system during the reporting year.

As to the type of changes made in the agricultural practice in the last 12 months due to climate change, 64.4% changed planting or harvesting time to better suit weather, 42.6% used climate adaptive varieties (e.g. flood tolerant rice, drought tolerant crops, disease or insect resistant varieties), 17.4% used climate adaptive technologies (sack methods, raised bed, tower garden, floating seed bed, mulching etc.), and 5.8% raised the ground level of their homesteads.

As to the practice of safety measures during pesticide use, 89% wore masks, 57% sprayed according to wind direction and 35% safely disposed of spray items. A little over one fourth wore hand gloves and less than one-fifth wore aprons or kept people and animals away. Only 3% wore shoes and goggles.



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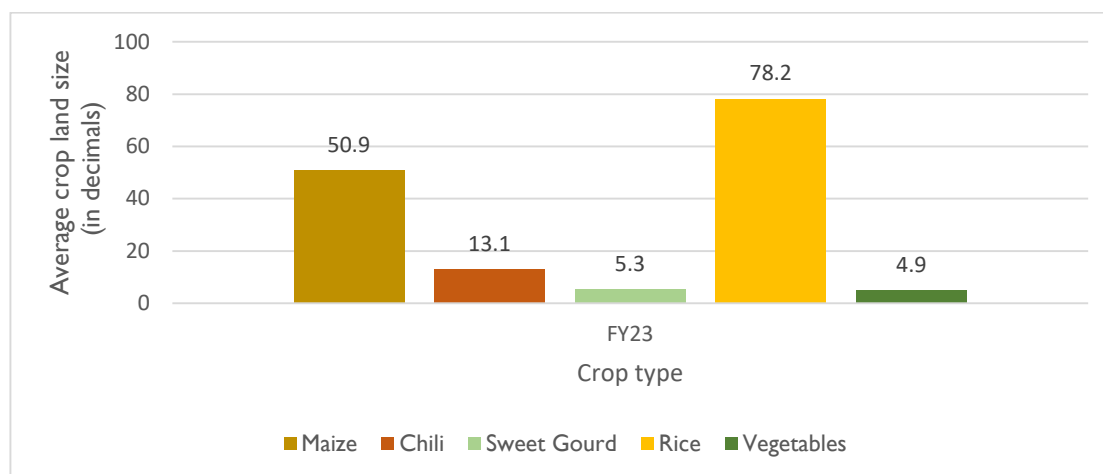


3.1.2 EG.3.2-25: Number of hectares under improved management practices or technologies with USG assistance [IM-level]

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
15,583	17,622	113

This indicator measured the area in hectares where USG-promoted improved management practices or technologies were applied during the reporting year to areas managed or cultivated by producers participating in a USG-funded activity. For reporting year PaBS FY23, management practices counted are agriculture-related, land- or water-based management practices and technologies in sectors such as cultivation of food and livestock management, including those that address climate change adaptation and mitigation. Improved management practices or technologies are those promoted by the implementing partner as a way to increase producer's productivity and/or resilience. The previous SHOUHARDO III program had promoted and expedited improved and adaptable varieties in order to increase crop production among the small and marginal farmers through incentives and development assistance such as agricultural inputs, fertilizers, mechanization of agriculture, innovation of new cropping systems, development of irrigation systems, implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) system, production of transgenic crops, high yielding varieties including climate tolerant varieties etc. This indicator measured the area in hectares in which USG-promoted improved management practices/technologies were applied in the reporting year and were managed/cultivated by producers participating in the SHOUHARDO III Plus project.

Figure 2: Average crop land size (in decimals) used for improved technology per farmer



3.1.3 EG.3-10,-11,-12: Yield of targeted agricultural commodities among program participants with USG assistance [IM-level]

SHOUHARDO III Plus has been promoting new technologies and varieties to increase food production and food security in order strengthen the resilience of the poor and marginalized families to cope with food crisis as they spend a large share of their income on food. This indicator is measured by metric ton of crop production per hectare and production of goat/duck in Kg. per animal. The PaBS FY23 reveals an increase in food production in most of the commodities promoted by the project.

The yields of most of the targeted agricultural crops produced have exceeded targets: sweet gourd (119%), vegetables (117%), maize (110%), chili (105%) and 91% for rice. For live goats and ducks the achievements are 109% and 104%.

3.1.4 EG.3.2-26 Value of annual sales of producers and firms receiving USG assistance [IM-level]

This indicator measured the sales value in U.S. dollars of the total amount of sales of commodities (crops and animals produced by USG-assisted producers and farms) during the reporting of PaBS FY23. This indicator also collects additional data points on the value of sales in local currency, the number of activity participants, including the number of producers and the number of assisted private sector firms, and the volume of sales (in metric tons) for agricultural commodities (i.e. seed; food, non-food and feed crops; livestock and livestock products, fish).

The target values represented increases between 1 and 4.2% from base values and findings suggest that the annual sales value of commodities sold by producers have exceeded their target for all commodities except for sweet gourd (90.3%). It was found to be highest for vegetables (199%), followed by ducks (130%), rice (121.5%), goats (117%), chili (107.6%) and maize (102%).

3.1.4 Custom: Mean decision-making score (Index) for women at household level

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
38.5	45.5	118%

This indicator provides information on women's decision-making ability and participation in household decision-making. It encompasses a range of choices, such as deciding how to spend money earned by oneself, selling crops, purchasing small items like groceries and toiletries, buying clothes for oneself and children, buying or selling major household assets like land and livestock, purchasing or selling jewelry, using loans or savings, paying for children's education expenses, medical expenses for herself or children, expenses for family planning (contraceptives), moving to shelter during disasters, actively participating in local arbitration decisions, investing credit funds/savings, providing childcare, ensuring continued education for both boys and girls, and participating in social activities, including NGOs. Results of PaBS

The mean decision-making score has been calculated following women's decision-making options on key decision areas.

- Can decide with husband or other adult male member in the family
- Can decide alone
- Husband makes decision after discussion with wife
- Not involved in decision

Figure 4 informs that women are active participants in the 16 categories with a median of 57%, ranging between 39.5% (participation in salish (local arbitration) and 78.5% (buying small food items, groceries, toiletries). Of particular interest are the 75% for spending money earned by herself, 55% for medical expenses for herself or children and 54% for family planning (contraceptives). At the other extreme women have no say in the decision making with 39% in salish (local arbitration) and 10% for family planning.

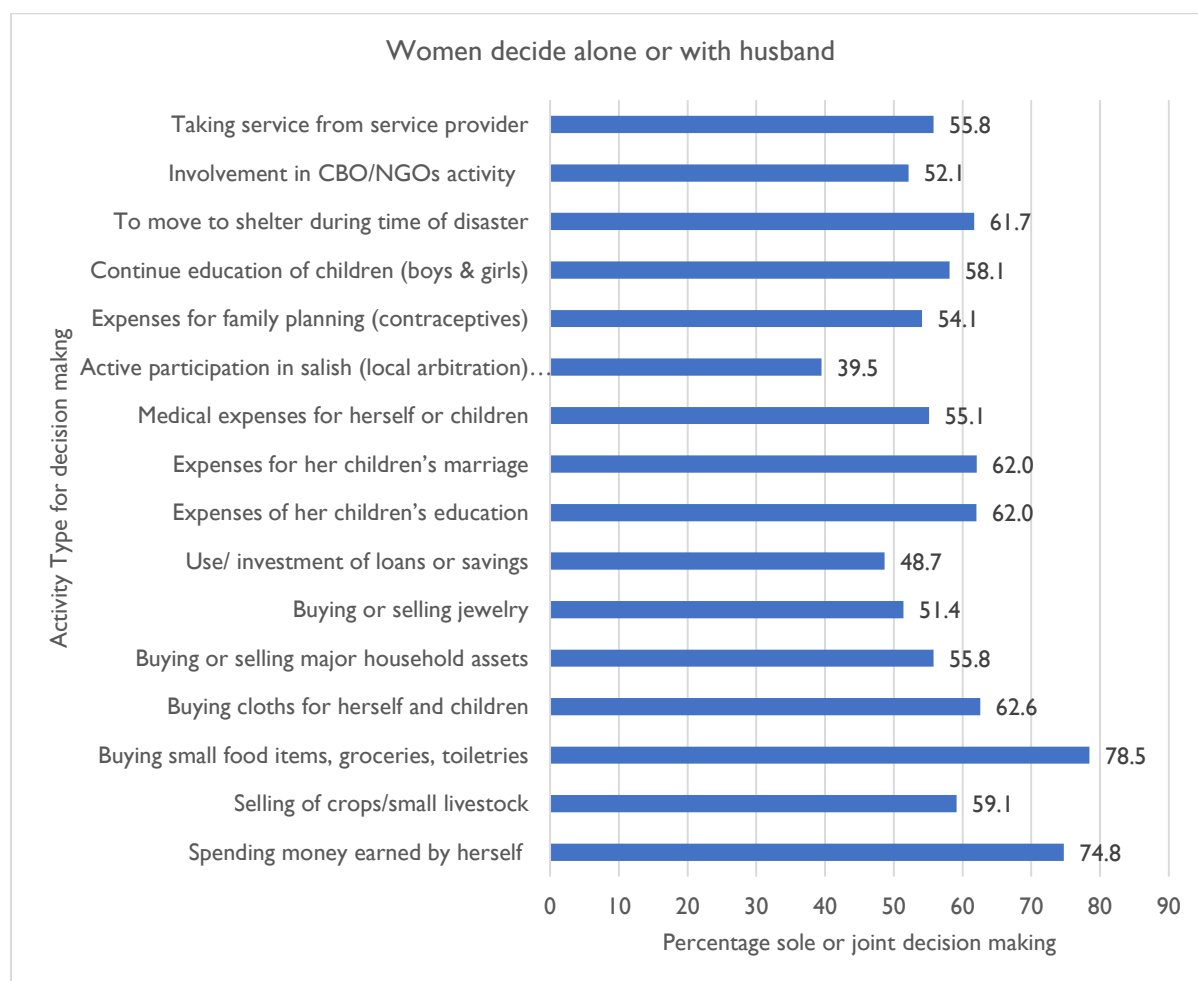
As the scope of decision-making broadens to include long-term implications for the household and engagement with external entities, there is a noticeable trend of diminishing active participation by women. This suggests that as decisions become more complex and far-reaching, women may face barriers or feel less empowered to contribute and be involved.



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Figure 3: Women's decision-making options on key decision areas



3.1.5 Custom: Percentage of households reported increased income

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
40	42.7	106.8%

This indicator measures the percentage of households that have increased income as a result of SHOUHARDO III Plus activity. The income increased through engaging in a range of food production activities, such as vegetable production, cereals, fish, poultry, and livestock production as well as engaging in off-farm business. 88.3% of households reported that HH expenditure had increased in the last 12 months as compared to the previous year.

3.1.6 Custom: Percentage of individuals whose income sources have grown

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
25	21	84%

This indicator measures the percentage of households that have increased their sources of income as a result of the SHOUHARDO III Plus activity. This may come from a range of food production activities, such as vegetable production, cereals, fish, poultry and livestock production as well as

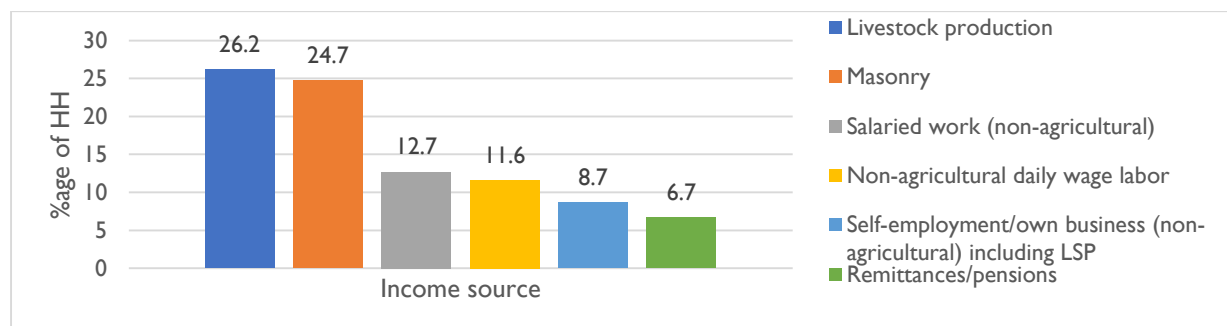


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engaging in non-farm business. Non-Farm income increased due to improvement of participants business service development including the market linkages facilitated by the program.

Figure 4: Type of income source increased as reported by respondents



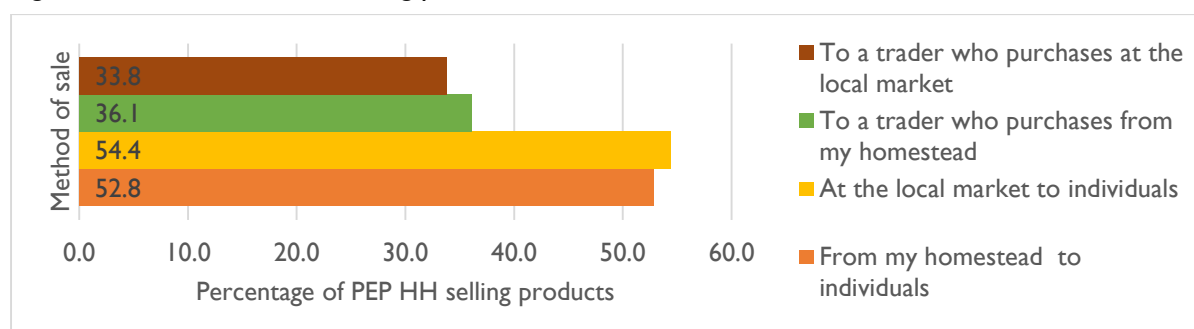
New income sources with less than 5% uptake were: agricultural daily wage labor and salaried work, sale of wild/bush products (e.g., honey, wood, charcoal), handicrafts, childcare/domestic work (paid), fishing, carpentry, driving, parlor/saloon, tailoring and other. The prime contribution of SHOUHARDO III Plus to increasing income sources is for livestock production, which is particularly useful to women.

3.1.7 Custom: Percentage of poor & extreme poor (PEP) households accessing markets

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
85	80.7	94.9%

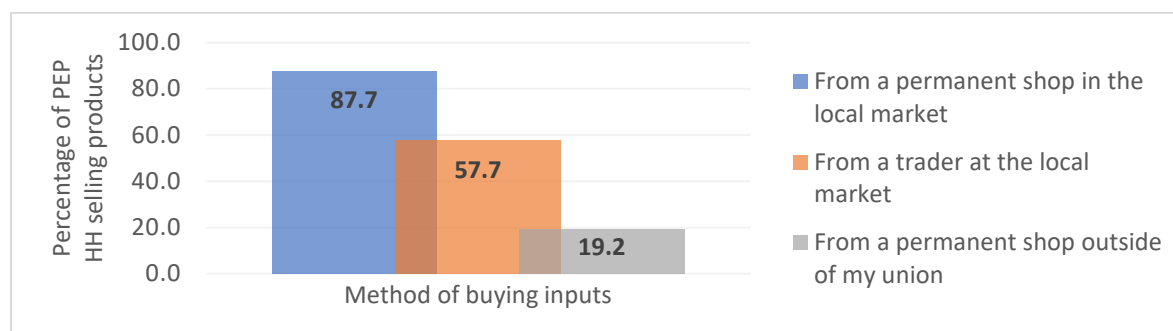
This indicator measured PEP participants accessing local markets for selling products or purchasing inputs (seed, fertilizer, raw materials, etc.).

Figure 5: Market access for selling products



The high number who sell from home or at local markets is an advantage for women and likely a reflection of Collector LSP activity.

Figure 6: Market access for buying inputs



The key problems encountered by HHs in selling products are: not enough space for farmers (60%) and high market charges (47.8%), and in the case of purchasing inputs, it was high prices (68.7%) and no quality seed available in nearby markets (48%).

3.1.8 Custom: Percentage of people received service from USG supported Local Service Providers

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
97.5	68.6	70.3%

This indicator measured the percentage of people (both PEP and Non-PEP) who received services from the seven types of local service providers (LSPs) during the last 12 months.

The global 68.6% rate is lower than the percentage of PEP HH receiving agricultural services (69.6%) and animal health services (76.6%) in the last 12 months (MCHN survey). This may be explained by the indication from many Non-PEP respondents that they had little knowledge of LSPs, although in reality they had used them without knowing they were LSPs and not all LSP services are offered across all locations.

The FY2023 target data incorporated services offered by both LSP and Community-Level Facilitators (CLF-Non-LSPs), while FY2023 specifically focuses on the service delivery of the seven LSPs. Based on the activity's design, these seven types of LSPs operate in regions with noticeable gaps in public service offerings; for instance, areas where PCSBAs services are not conveniently located near public health facilities. To amplify service provision and ensure quality delivery across both private and public sectors, including LSPs, the SHOUHARDO III Plus Activity persistently champions skill enhancement and initiative linkages. It is essential to note that LSP service provision is not confined to a single category. Instead, services often span multiple categories, and as highlighted in the survey, sometimes extend beyond these predefined areas to offer additional services and products.

Types of LSPs:

1. Vaccinator (VX)
2. Seed Agent (SA)
3. Fish Fry Hawker (FFH)
4. Collector (CO)
5. Shanchay Sathi/Village Agent (SS)
6. Private Community Skilled Birth Attendants (PCSBA)*
7. Blue Star Provider (BSP)*

* PCSBA and BSP are collectively referred to as Health Agents (HA)

LSP Services: Vaccinator/ Seed Agent/ fish fry hawker services have been developed and promoted by the activity to ensure agricultural support to the community people, such as the Vaccinator for livestock & poultry vaccination, Seed Agent and Fish Fry Hawker for supply of quality seed and fingerling respectively. They also provide technical knowledge on livestock rearing/agriculture/fisheries in line with their service provision. The Collector collects produce from homesteads/fields to sell to distant market as well as advising farmers regarding market demand. In addition, the project has also promoted Private Community Skilled Birth Attendance (PCSBA) and Blue Star Providers (BSP) to ensure health and nutrition services to underserved communities. The PCSBA services include birth assistance, antenatal and postnatal care (ANC/PNC), essential newborn care (ENC), primary health care (PHC), growth monitoring and promotion (GMP) and nutrition counseling. The focus of BSP services is PHC, GMP and family planning (FP) injectable service. The Sanchay Sathi services includes the facilitation and creation of community-based savings and credit groups (VSLA).



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3.1.9 Custom: Percentage of farmers who report access to market information in last 12 months

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
77	75.5	98%

The program developed local farming input providers (Seed Agent for seed, Fish Fry Hawker for fingerling, Vaccinator for animal vaccine) and formed village entrepreneur fora with village level input/service providers related to farming production for quality services. To measure this indicator, PaBS FY23 took into consideration farmers who received input and output market information from LSPs for their production activities in the last 12 months.

3.2 Intermediate Result Area 2: Improved nutritional status of children under five years of age, pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls

3.2.1 HL9.1-d Percent of women of reproductive age consuming a diet of minimum diversity [ZOI-level]

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
55%	49.8%	90.6%

This global indicator measures percentage of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) who consumed a diet of minimum diversity (MDDW). A woman of reproductive age is considered to consume a diet of minimum diversity if she consumed at least five out of 10 food groups throughout the previous day and night. The 10 food groups included in the MDD-W indicator are:

1. Grains, white roots and tubers, and plantains
2. Pulses (beans, peas and lentils)
3. Nuts and seeds⁵ (including groundnut)
4. Dairy
5. Meat, poultry and fish
6. Eggs
7. Dark green leafy vegetables
8. Other vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables
9. Other vegetables
10. Other fruits

3.2.2 Prevalence of children 6–23 months receiving a Minimum Dietary Diversity

Infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices directly impact the health of under two children. Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD), an IYCF indicator assesses feeding practices of children aged 6–23 months. In June 2017, a WHO-UNICEF Technical Expert Advisory group on nutrition Monitoring (TEAM) updated the minimum dietary diversity (MDD) indicator as defined by the WHO (2008), from four of seven groups to five of eight groups⁶. Thus, dietary diversity is present when the diet contains five or more of the following food groups:

⁵ “Seeds” in the botanical sense includes a very broad range of items, including grains and pulses. However, seeds are used here in a culinary sense to refer to a limited number of seeds, excluding grains or pulses, which are typically high in fat content and are consumed as a substantial ingredient in local dishes or eaten as a substantial snack or side dish. Examples include squash/melon/gourd seeds used as a main ingredient in West African stews and sesame seed paste (tahini) in some dishes in Middle Eastern cuisines.

⁶ Infant and Young Child Feeding, WHO. <https://www.who.int/data/nutrition/nlis/info/infant-and-young-child-feeding>

- breast milk;
- grains, roots and tubers;
- legumes and nuts;
- dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese);
- flesh foods (meat, fish, poultry, liver or other organs);
- eggs;
- vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables; and
- other fruits and vegetables.

There is no target value and it was found that MDD in children 6-23 months is 52.1% with female children (56.4%) compared to their male counterparts (47.1%) though the nominal base value was 69.8% (-25%).

3.2.3 Prevalence of children 6–23 months receiving a Minimum Meal Frequency

The WHO minimum daily meal frequency is defined as:

- twice for breastfed infants aged 6-8 months,
- three times for breastfed children aged 9-23 months
- four times for non-breastfed children aged 6-23 months

There is no target value and it was found that MMF in children 6-23 months is 32.9% with female children (28.2%) compared to their male counterparts (38.2%), while the nominal base value was 56.6% (-42%).

The qualitative survey does not reveal clearly why these last two indicators are so low, but there is a likely contribution of the price increases which caused 79.8% of HH to adopt coping mechanisms that negatively affect eating practices and it seems the children suffer more than the adults.

3.2.4 Custom: Percentage of pregnant women who received pregnancy care support (day-time rest, extra food) during pregnancy period

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
84.5	76.9	91.0%

This indicator measured the percentage of pregnant women who received pregnancy care support, i.e. their families provided them with additional food and day-time rest throughout their pregnancy period. These extra food and day-time rest are ensured either by themselves or other members of the households. According to indicator definition, if a pregnant woman took more food or more daytime rest during pregnancy compared to usually as they did, then they were considered as receiving pregnancy care support.

To calculate the amount of food respondent ate during pregnancy, she was asked if she took the same amount of food as usual or more food than usual or less food than usual. Similarly day-time rest during respondent's pregnancy was calculated by asking if she took the same amount of day-time rest as usual or more day-time rest than usual or less day-time rest than usual.

3.2.5 Live births receiving at least four antenatal care (ANC) visits during pregnancy

This indicator measured the number women who after taking four or more antenatal care (ANC) services and delivered a live child during the last 12 months. ANC provides women and their families with appropriate information and advice for a healthy pregnancy, safe childbirth, and postnatal recovery. ANC services are important for identifying high-risk pregnancies and thus guides on essential care required to prevent child and maternal deaths. ANC protects the health of women and their

unborn babies during pregnancy so as to achieve at the end of a pregnancy a HEALTHY MOTHER and a HEALTHY BABY⁷.

There is no target value and it was found that 43.8% of live births received at least four ANC visits during pregnancy which is an improvement on the nominal 24.6 % base value. One likely explanation is that women could not access a health facility during floods.

3.2.6 Custom: Percentage of participants who reported increased access to targeted public services (ITT)

Target FY23	Result FY23	% of Target Achieved
95	89.9	94.6%

This indicator measures progress in participants' access to targeted public services under agriculture and nutrition mainly. The activities with social accountability interventions typically work with both service providers and activity participants.

This indicator does not track the usage of services because use depends on the need for the services which may vary year to year. Instead, the indicator tracks perceived access and availability: Whether a participant thinks that s/he has access to the services when s/he needs it. As per indicator definition the activity targeted a service, or set of services (e.g., DAE, DLS, DoF, MoH&FW), or any other targeted service. Services targeted depended on the activity's interventions.

This indicator is labeled as cumulative because a participant needs to be interviewed annually even if she or he reported increased access in the previous years. Having access in one year does not mean the participant will have continued access to services.

With regard to services from individual government departments, it was found that overall agriculture services were received by 30.2% of HH (94.3% from the Department of Agriculture Extension) and 63.2% of HH received livestock services (24.9% from the Department for Animal Health Service). Overall 92.4% mentioned that there is a functioning health/nutrition service center and 90.6% said that they received health/nutrition services in the last 12 months.

3.3 CCI: Vulnerable people and community groups applied appropriate strategies to reduce negative impacts from, and response to shocks and stresses

3.3.1 Prices of essential food commodities

Data sourced from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics reveals that in August 2023, the annual inflation rate in Bangladesh was positioned at 9.9%⁸. This represents a slight increment from the prior month, which recorded an inflation rate of 9.7%⁹. Primary drivers behind this inflation in Bangladesh include food items and non-alcoholic beverages, accounting for 59% of the consumer price index¹⁰. Specifically, the inflation rate for this segment peaked at 12.5% in August 2023¹¹. Other influential sectors, like transportation, also contributed, with an inflation rate of 8.7%¹². It is noteworthy that since April 2023,

⁷ SDN-CC-10-01-GUIDELINE-eng-Antenatal-Health-Care-Services.pdf

<https://platform.who.int/docs/default-source/mca-documents/policy-documents/guideline/SDN-CC-10-01-GUIDELINE-eng-Antenatal-Health-Care-Services.pdf>

⁸ bb.org.bd

⁹ tradingeconomics.com

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ bb.org.bd

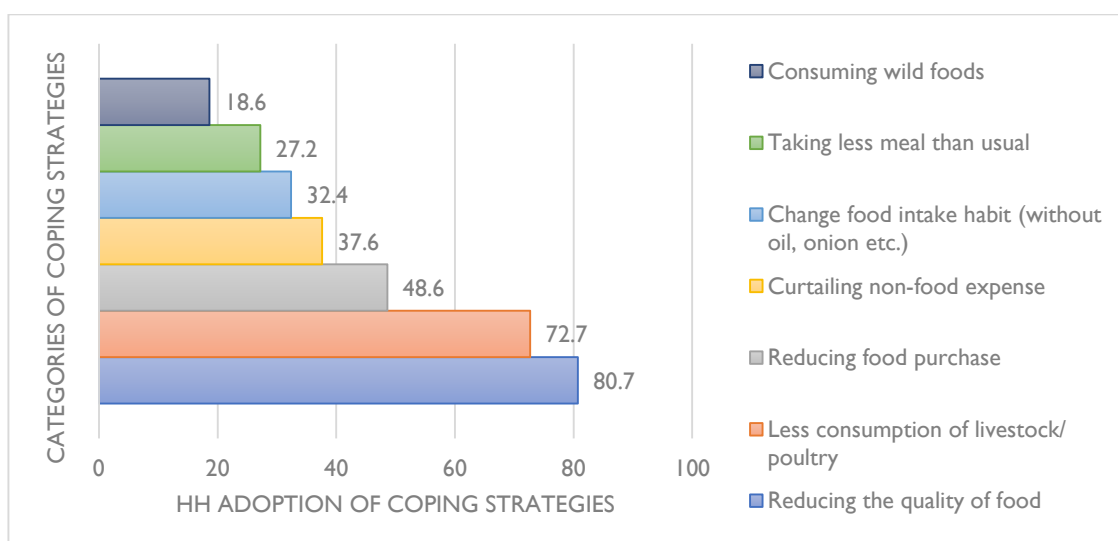
¹² tradingeconomics.com

the inflation rate in Bangladesh has consistently exceeded 9%, with forecasts indicating a settling point around 5.5% in the upcoming years¹³.

The PaBS FY23 found that 97.3% of households have been experiencing a significant increase in the price of essential food commodities over the last six months. It was found that monthly household's food expenses had increased to 7,499 BDT as compared to 5,503 BDT six months earlier, a 36% increase. The highest increase was for oil (75%), followed by rice and onions (39%), vegetables (28%), potatoes (22%), sugar (17.5%) chili (13%), lentils and fish (11%). Items which rose by less than 10% were eggs, meat, salt, flour and milk.

3.3.2 Resilience: Coping strategies to minimize the impact of price hikes

Figure 7: Coping strategies adopted by HHs to minimize the impact of price hikes



In order to minimize the impact of price hikes the households adopted several coping strategies which focused on reduced food quality and reduced food consumption. 80.7% HHs reported reducing the quality of food, 72.7% HHs mentioned less consumption of livestock/poultry (72.7% HHs), 48.6% HHs said reducing food purchase and another 32.4% mentioned about change in food intake habit (without oil, onion etc.). 27.2% HHs coped by taking fewer meals than usual and 18.6% coped by consuming food collected from wild sources. An additional 37.6% reported curtailing non-food expenses.

3.3.3 Impacts of the price hike of food commodities on HH livelihoods

The impact of this price hike was mostly expressed in a reduced intake of nutritious food (79.8%), failure to meet non-food expense (65.5%), failure to meet food expense (52.5%) and a reduced living standard (43.2%). Other impacts included failure to meet medical expenses (18.8%), failure to meet education expenses (10.8%) and an increase in domestic violence (5.3%).

3.3.4 Women facing violence in the last 6 months due to the price hike of food commodities

The PaBS FY23 explored the situation of violence against women as an impact of the price hike and 44.7% reported facing mental/ emotional/psychological abuse and 12.3% facing physical abuse. Less than 1% of respondents reported facing sexual abuse, economic abuse, divorce/separation.

¹³ statista.com

3.4 CC2: Increased women's empowerment and gender equity at household and community level

3.4.1 Program participants awareness of cost and consequences of Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Gender Based Violence is widespread among women and girls. Screening data obtained by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) from its female clients found that one in four women and girls faced gender-based violence (GBV) in rural areas of Bangladesh¹⁴. According to a report by Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, a total of 3,703 women and girls were subjected to different forms of violence including rape and murder in 2021.¹⁵

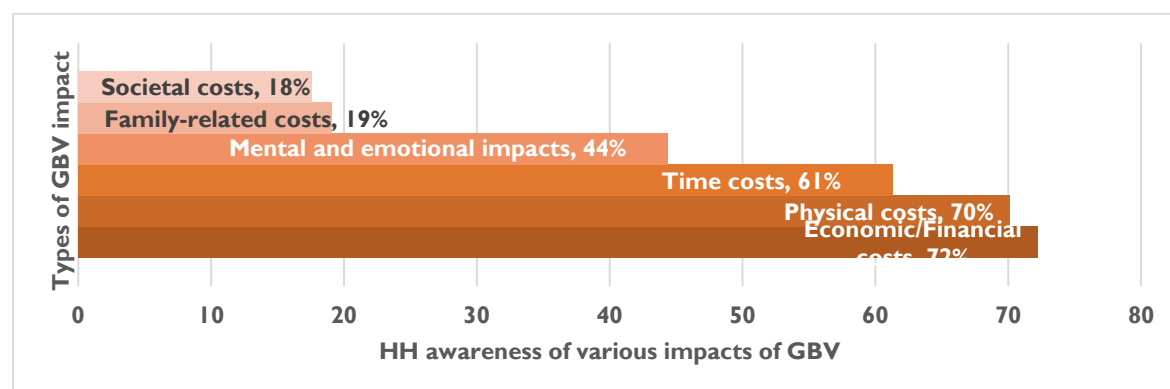
According to the [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/gender-based-violence), around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner – a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade. Intimate partner violence is the most common form suffered by women, with around 641 million affected globally.¹⁶

In a report of Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), an initiative of UNDP's Partnerships for a Tolerant and Inclusive Bangladesh (PTIB) project, it has been found to be an increasing trend in GBV (report on GBV data analysis from May 2018 to April 2021). The analysis found that Women and girls are the biggest victims of GBV. Girls, including children, faced 60% of sexual assaults in 2020-21 alone¹⁷.

SHOUHARDO activities have emphasized and strengthened the gender-equitable ability of people, households and communities, to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from human-caused and natural shocks. This section presents findings on awareness on Gender Based Violence (GBV), women's mobility and men's participation in sharing tasks with women.

The PaBS FY23 found that 98% of households were aware of the cost and consequences of GBV, ranging from 72% for financial costs to 18% for societal costs.

Figure 8: Awareness on type of cost and consequences of Gender Based Violence



¹⁴ <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/291058/study-one-in-four-women-face-gender-based>. Cited 10 October 2023

¹⁵ <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/318390/over-3-700-incidents-of-violence-against-women>. Cited 10 October 2023

¹⁶ UN News, Global perspective Human Stories. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1141842>. Cited 10 October 2023

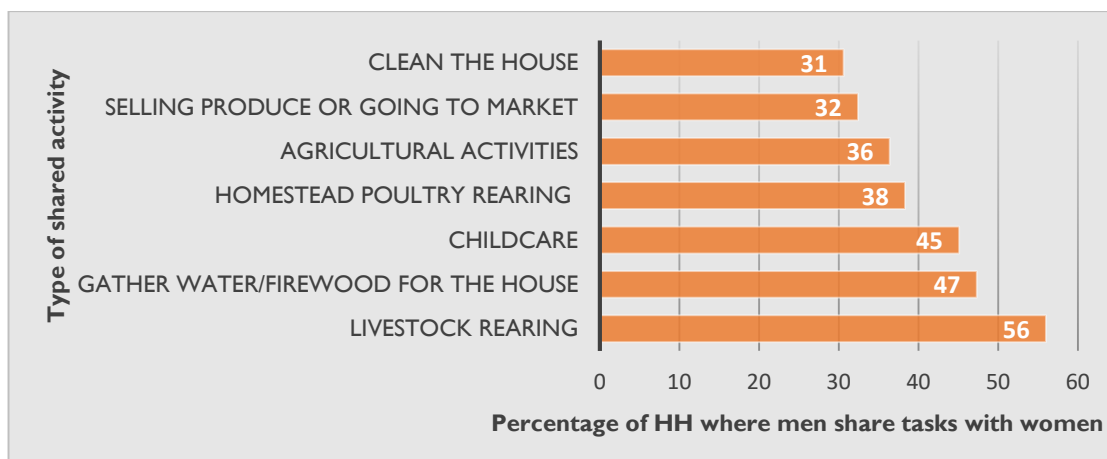
¹⁷ Gender-based violence: taking stock of Bangladesh's shadow pandemic, APRIL 10, 2022. <https://www.undp.org/bangladesh/blog/gender-based-violence-taking-stock-bangladesh%E2%80%99s-shadow-pandemic>. Cited 10 October 2023



3.4.2 Men's participation in sharing tasks with women

78% households mentioned that men participated in tasks with women.

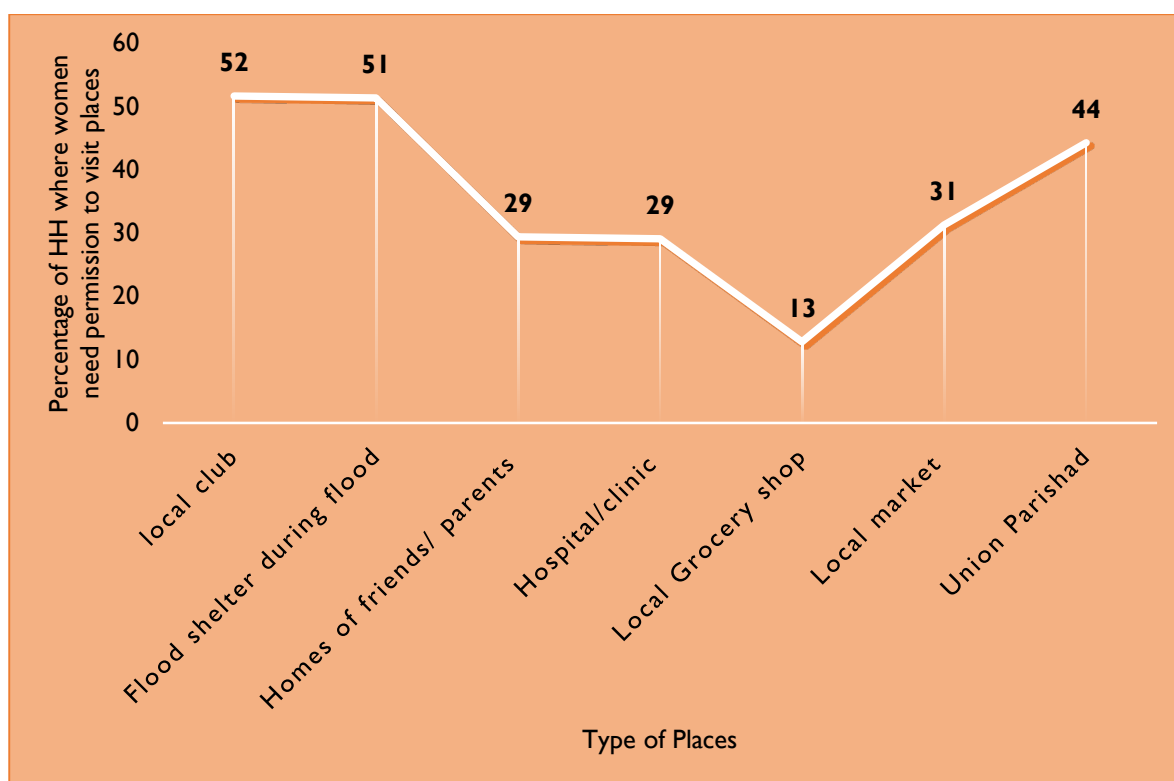
Figure 9: Men's participation in sharing tasks with women



3.4.3 Mobility

64.2% of households mentioned that women need permission to visit outside the house.

Figure 10: Women requiring permission to visit places



Similarly to the decision making index (3.1.4), there seems to be a scale of decreasing autonomous mobility as the potential interactions might affect the household and involve external entities. However, women also expressed enjoying greater mobility due to LSP services closer to their homesteads, especially at local markets.

3.5 CC3: Increased provision and equitable utilization of public services for vulnerable people and community groups

3.5.1 Households receiving support from Government and NGOs

Households were asked if they have received any support from the government and NGOs over the last 12 months. The PaBS FY23 found that 66.5% of the households received support from the government or Union Parishad. It was also found that 69.3% received Safety Net Support (VGF, VGD, Old Age allowance, 100/40 days, Maternity allowance, etc.), 25.8% for Birth/Death certificate and 17.1% for Nationality certificate/Character certificate. Less than 10% received other types of support. The qualitative survey results support this finding (section on VDCs below).

14.1% of households reported receiving support from NGOs, 48% for Emergency food assistance, 37% for Emergency cash assistance, 21% for Agricultural inputs and 20% for Livestock inputs. Less than 5% received other types of support.

3.5.2 Type of services received by households from different sources in the past 12 months

The PaBS FY23 found that 92.4% HHs reported that they can get health services from functioning health/nutrition service centers in their areas. These included government (92.4%), private (24.8%) and NGO health centers (21.7%). Functioning LSPs health/nutrition services was mentioned by 48.5% HHs.

Figure 11: Type of services received/accessed by HHs in past 12 months

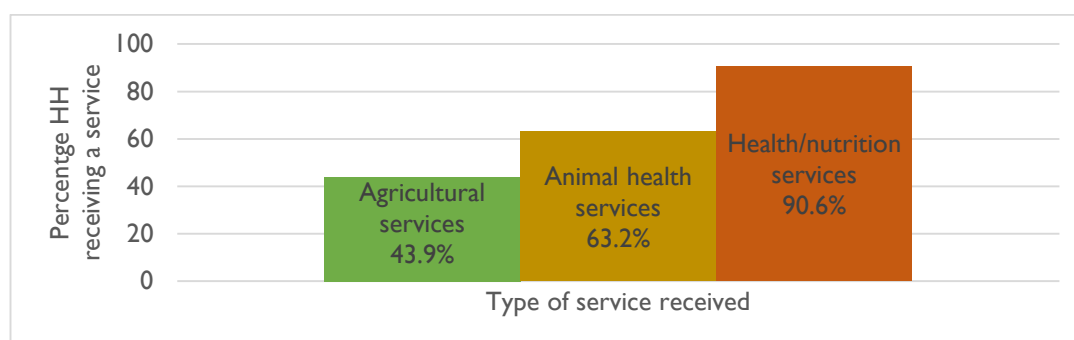
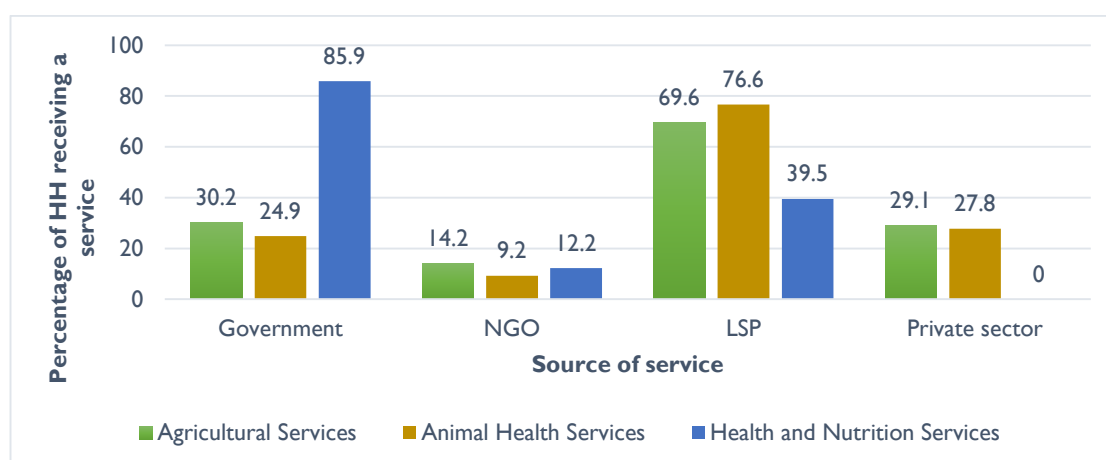


Figure 12: % of households receiving services from different sources in the past 12 months



3.5.3 Households level of satisfaction in receiving services from different sources

Findings also suggest that the majority of the HHs were satisfied with the services they received from the government, NGOs, LSPs and private sector related to agriculture, livestock and health/nutrition. Over 90% of HHs were satisfied with the government and NGO services related to agriculture and livestock, over 80% HHs were satisfied with government and NGO health/nutrition services. 90% of HHs were satisfied with LSP agricultural services and over 80% HHs were satisfied with LSP animal health and health/nutrition services. In all cases the non-LSP private sector received the lowest level of satisfaction (86% for livestock and health services).

3.5.4 HH members involved in a VSLA or formal/informal financial institutions

The PaBS FY23 found that 61.8% households members were involved in formal/informal financial institutions. Among these only 22.5% HH members were included in VSLA and 94.2% were involved with BRAC/ASA/other MFIs, 12.5% with Local Samity and 3.5% with Farmers' Groups.

The percentage of household members who had taken loans from one or several Micro Finance Institution (MFI) in the last 12 months was found to be 45.9%. The average number of loans was 1.21 and the average total loan amount was found to be 54,982 BDT. Major purposes for taking loans were for food and clothes (21%), health treatment/medicine and loan repayment (20% each), housing repair/tax (16%), agricultural inputs (13%) and for starting small business (9%). Although the qualitative survey does not provide insights on loans, the fact that only about 20% is used for productive purposes and that the average is for more than one loan must imply a significant depth of burden due to indebtedness.

3.5.6 Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (EMMP)

This section measured safety measures adopted by the SHOUHARDO III Plus Activity participants in relation to application of pesticides as per Pesticide Evaluation Report and Safer Use Action Plan (PERSUAP).

The percentage of HHs participants received messages from Seed Agent (SA) on the use of organic fertilizer was 55.5%, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practice (49.1%), the use of registered pesticides (61%), chemical fertilizers with safety measures (81%) and the use of local variety seeds (60%). PEP and Non-PEP had near similar results except for the latter with a near doubling of incidence for IPM practice and the use local seeds. PEP had better results only for the use of registered pesticides, 66% against 54.4%.

Waste management included cleaning and washing livestock rearing places and its surroundings and discharging cow dung in a pit at a safe corner. In this reporting year, it is found that 81% of agricultural participants applied safety measures during spraying pesticide; 68% of IGA participants practiced safe management of waste materials. In addition, 100% of households were using an improved drinking water source.

4. Findings on LSP Service Provisioning

The SHOUHARDO III Plus initiative prioritizes diverse income avenues, champions sustainable agriculture-led growth, expands market accessibility, particularly for women and girls, and strengthens financial service access for PEP participants. A foundational aspect of the activity is the improvement of nutritional health for children under five, pregnant and lactating women, and adolescent girls. This goal is actualized through leveraging services from both government and private sectors, including through the program-facilitated Local Service Providers (LSPs) in underserved areas.

In line with its service provision strategy, SHOUHARDO III Plus has established seven LSP categories in isolated areas, catering to a wide range of community needs for both PEP and Non-PEP demographics. These LSPs are deeply committed to their communities, frequently offering goods and

services at minimal costs to aid the extremely underprivileged.

Through linkage meetings and other initiatives, SHOUHARDO III Plus cultivates partnerships between LSPs, the government, and private enterprises. This collaboration encompasses key governmental sectors including agriculture, livestock, fisheries, health, family planning, and women's and children's affairs. By aligning LSPs with these departments, the activity aims to guarantee a consistent provision of essential services. An illustration of this is how vaccinators leverage vaccines sourced from the livestock department to augment and advocate for vaccination services at the grassroots level. Concurrently, with the support of SHOUHARDO III Plus, community representatives actively engage with both local and national government institutions, to assist with timely and expected service delivery from both the public sector and LSPs.

Under the program's design, seven distinct types of LSPs operate in regions where there is a marked absence of public services such as PCSBAs services. Although the qualitative survey emphasizes WASH LSPs, the current iteration of SHOUHARDO III Plus does not cover this sector. Funding limitations prevented its integration post-SHOUHARDO III. However, insights from the qualitative survey underscore the significance and sustained service delivery by these LSPs, affirming the sustainability of their service.

To elevate service standards and expand its reach across both public and private sectors, SHOUHARDO III Plus unceasingly endorses skill enhancement and program synergies. It is imperative to recognize that LSPs' service scope is not restricted to a singular domain. They frequently span multiple sectors, and as the survey reveals, sometimes venture beyond established parameters, providing an extensive range of services and products.

4.1 General findings from the quantitative survey

The Quantitative Survey reveals that more than 74% of households are aware of Vaccinators and Seed Agents but less than 6% know about the BSP but not all LSP services are offered across all locations. For example, in both regions 61% of Unions do not have BSPs, 53% do not have Fish Fry Hawkers and in Char, 74% do not have PCSBAs as compared to 28% in Haor I¹⁸. 69% of all households received a service from LSPs in the last 12 months and more than 95% were satisfied with their service and all are willing to pay them.

Non-PEP benefitted much more from most LSP products and services due to their better economic situation, particularly from Vaccinators, Seed Agents, Fish Hawkers, Collectors and WASH Agents (by more than 30%).

In contrast, PEP benefitted more than Non-PEP only for the VSLA activity and much less than Non-PEP from LSP technical support (from 50% to 90% less).

For both populations the 4 best benefits of LSP services were the same: good availability, time/energy saving, better quality of life and better knowledge.

The Qualitative Survey reveals a high degree of satisfaction with LSP services and all respondents state to be willing to pay them.

Satisfaction levels with LSP service ranged from 95% (Collector) to 100% (FFH and BSP), a remarkable achievement.

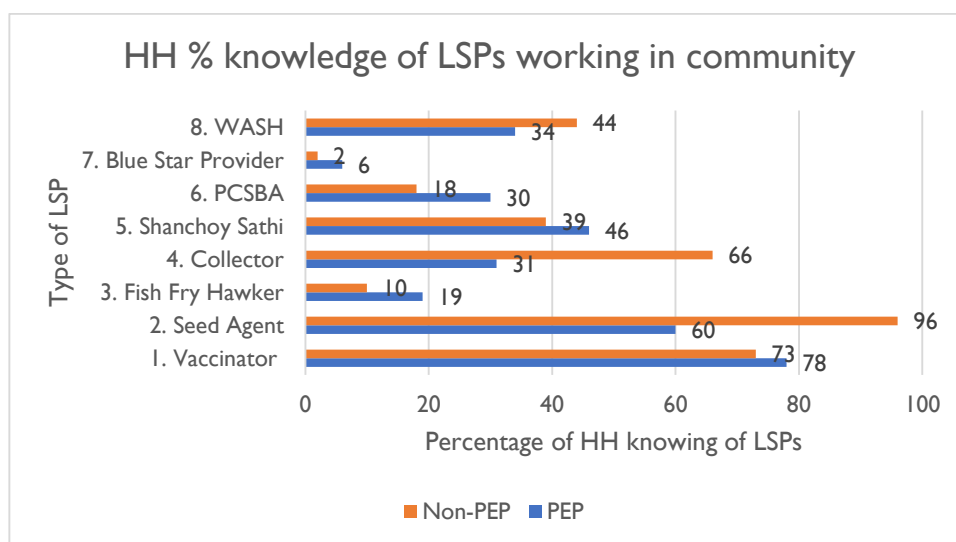
In terms of geographic nuances, only three out of the eight districts reported Non-PEP awareness of SHOUHARDO III Plus and LSPs, with respondents claiming indirect benefits. These districts are Gaibandha, Kishoreganj, and Sunamganj. The primary benefits highlighted include increased vegetable and small livestock production, the establishment of their own VSLAs, enhanced health and nutrition services, and better access to seeds and livestock vaccination. Additionally, for LSPs that often travel

¹⁸ From information provided by the SHOUHARDO III Plus Activity.

extensively for their duties, certain wards, unions, and districts are distinctly influenced by the region's topography and the seasonal impact of the monsoons.

For these three districts, it is an encouraging sign for LSP sustainability as they are motivated and able to broaden their range of services and product offerings to the entire community, though the activity was primarily crafted with a focus on PEP.

Figure 13: Percentage of PEP and Non-PEP who know of LSPs working in their communities



For both groups the two best known LSPs are the Livestock Vaccinators and the Seed Agents, followed by the SS for the PEP and the Collectors for the Non-PEP, as expected as they address households' most prevalent activities of in agriculture and livestock. For economic reasons, non-PEP had better knowledge of Seed Agents, Collectors and WASH LSPs and PEP for of Fish Hawkers and Health agents. Both groups have fairly similar results for Vaccinators and VSLA agents.

Table 6: % HH receiving LSP services in the last 12 months

Did your household receive service from the LSPs in the last 12 months in %?				69%
	Overall	PEP	Non-PEP	Key Points
Vaccinator				a) High and Similar product+service use b) Non-PEP benefitted much more technical support
Received Vaccinated livestock & poultry	75	74	76	
Received technical support	37	27	58	
Seed Agent				c) Non-PEP benefitted much more from seed purchase (expected)
Purchased Seed	79	67	95	
Received technical support	36	28	46	
Fish Fry Hawker				d) Non-PEP benefitted much more from fish purchase (expected) e) Low and similar tech support
Purchase Fingerling	13	7	31	
Received technical support	2	2	3	
Collector: Sell Ag-products to collectors	67	54	83	f) Non-PEP benefitted much more from produce collection (expected)

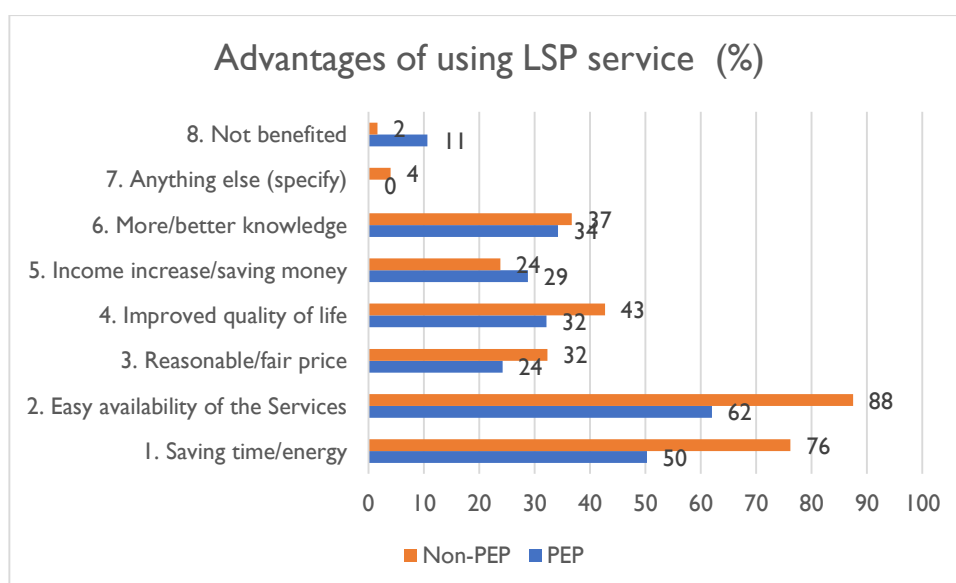


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Shanchay Sathi/VSLA Agent				g) Non-PEP also benefitted from VSLAs h) PEP used it more as a savings facility and Non-PEP as a credit facility
Formed VSLA group	41	43	33	
Collect savings	45	49	28	
Distribute loan	15	13	26	i) Economic reason for non-PEP (e)
PCSBA				
a. Received referral service	14	14	11	
b. Received promote institutional birth delivery	10	6	56	
c. Received Pregnant/ IYCF counselling	20	15	78	
d. Received ANC/PNC service	21	17	78	
e. Purchasing essential health and hygiene items/ commodities	19	14	78	j) PEP more for b, d, k) Non-PEP more for c, f
Blue Star Provider				
a. Growth Monitoring	18	18	17	
b. Received ANC/PNC service	10	12	0	
c. Received IFA supplementation	27	20	67	
d. Injectable (FP) service	20	23	0	
f. Received nutritional counselling	25	20	50	
WASH				l) Non-PEP benefitted much more from WASH as they could better afford them
TW maintenance /repair works	51	34	94	
Purchased of improved latrine	25	18	41	
Received Technical Support	29	9	80	

Figure 14: How PEP and Non-PEP rate the advantages of using LSP services



For the PEP and Non-PEP, the four best benefits were remarkably similar: availability, time saving, quality of life and knowledge. While it makes sense that the Non-PEP have benefited more from LSP

services in 7 out of the 8 categories if the Non-PEP are from higher socio-economic strata, the qualitative survey indicates, paradoxically, that the Non-PEP have much lower knowledge of LSPs and there are no explanations for this difference nor how the Non-PEP would have known of the LSPs if they were not the target population.

4.2 General findings from the qualitative survey

SHOUHARDO III Plus is well appreciated by all and is perceived as being inclusive, although a few government officials and some non-PEP state to not know enough about SHOUHARDO III Plus as they joined to the area recently and the LSPs. Respondents are very satisfied with LSP services and indicate a willingness to pay for services if the quality is there, which is always the case for LSPs.

PEP

All the PEP respondents state to have a significantly better quality of life than before and mention many aspects such as: better financial situation, better knowledge, better access to public services, better food security (more vegetable plots and livestock, managed by women), improved health awareness, better communication, husbands and wives working together, a helping and supporting mindset, latrines, more disaster prepared, access to services through LSPs with fair prices and good quality.

They also mention having better access to services through the VDCs, mostly for administrative affairs and entitlements but also for social and infrastructure issues. They also mention now having better linkages with different government agencies like the DAE, ULO, Fisheries department, Community Clinics. They have the contact number of the Block Supervisor, the Livestock Officer, etc. from whom they can get information by just calling them.

There are many mentions of improvements in girls' and women's empowerment in SHOUHARDO areas with improved vegetable and small animals production and sale, better mobility, better access to services, more self-respect, better children schooling, better relationship with husbands, less family violence, selling eggs, less early marriage, more 4 ANC consultations, etc..

There is an excellent perception of LSPs due to the quality of their services, their availability, their flexibility and their general inclusiveness (gender, religion, etc.).

Non-PEP

An initial examination of the data might suggest that Non-PEP receive services from LSPs without recognizing them, as LSPs may not always identify themselves explicitly as part of SHOUHARDO III Plus or as its "agents". However, the data unambiguously indicates that non-PEP participants are also benefiting from SHOUHARDO III Plus promoted LSP services, sometimes even more than the PEP. A key insight is that the support from LSPs is integrated so naturally that many beneficiaries do not attribute it to being orchestrated by an NGO. This seamless integration is vital for the future, as LSPs are poised to transition into self-sustaining entrepreneurs. Establishing an identity beyond the program's scope is a pivotal progression for them.

4.3 Findings about LSPs from the qualitative survey

Most LSPs have a good level of education, some at university level and were already active in their sector of activity, with many with an established business before SHOUHARDO III Plus.

All LSPs are satisfied with the training received, though many would like more technical training. They all have increased their activities and are satisfied with them, are very satisfied with their roles, professional and social and one woman provides 3 types of LSP service (VX, SA, and SS).

Most LSPs know and help each other in their communities and are satisfied with their linkages to government and private product and service providers and appreciate how SHOUHARDO III Plus has much helped with their networking/linkages (public/private/peers).

The great majority of LSP plans to continue their LSP activities post project. The very few that may not mentioned personal circumstances (such as health), but nothing linked to the LSP activity in itself or the context.

In accordance with the SHOUHARDO III Plus strategy of promoting diversified livelihoods and nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset among LSPs, it's evident that many LSPs engage in other professions beyond their designated roles. These include occupations such as teaching, practicing rural medicine, owning rice mills or medicine shops, operating grocery stores, and practicing homeopathy, among others. While the majority do earn supplemental income from products or services related to their LSP activities, only a handful rely solely on their LSP endeavours for their livelihood.

Most LSPs get paid for products sold with an included profit (vax, seed, etc.), and very rarely for the service itself (advice, administering the product). They generally receive a contribution for their travel expenses if warranted.

From the qualitative data, a non-statistical estimate of LSP income would be:

- a) 10% get full income from LSP activity only (seems to depend on scale, more so for the SA and CO);
- b) 10% clearly do not get enough income (all SS and BSP);
- c) 50% have a satisfactory income from LSP and LSP related products & services;
- d) 30% have a satisfactory income from LSP and non-LSP related products & services.

Many, but not all LSPs use ICT and Apps, and it doesn't seem that women LSPs are particularly disadvantaged, but many LSPs from Habiganj and Netrokona districts did not use ICT and Apps.

The two most mentioned LSPs concerns are the lack of access to financing, especially the FFH, CO and SA, and access to continued technical training, especially for the SA, VX, FFH. Other concerns sometimes mentioned are: a) occasional shortage of inputs (HA, VX); d) occasional shortage of women LSPs (HA, VX); e) transport difficulties; f) weather/seasons; g) thefts (crops, chicken).

Most male LSPs work in multiple villages and Unions and women LSPs tend to work only in their village, or at least in a much more restricted geographical area. Most LSPs mention paying particular attention to the quality of their products when purchasing, as they know that it encourages clients to pay. It also gains their trust and thus ensure recurrent purchases.

4.4 Sustained Resources, Capacity, Linkages, Motivation

In the USAID model, the first level of Exit Strategies toward a Sustained Impact of is that of ensuring sustained Resources, Capacity, Linkages, Motivation¹⁹. In SHOUHARDO III Plus this is defined as a "continuation of strengthening and sustaining the LSP capacities, linkages, motivation and resources to facilitate market systems approaches in its implementation."

General findings

Resources: all LSPs are satisfied with their current access to both material, informational and training resources. Their main concerns are to access financing to further develop their businesses and to receive continued training.

Capacity: all LSPs are satisfied with their current capacity to deliver quality products and services and women feel encouraged to be LSPs. However there may be gaps in the use of ICT and Apps and a shortage of LSP services in some areas.

Linkages: all LSPs are satisfied with their current linkages to government and private entities, other LSPs and the VDCs. However there is no mention of linkages with other civil society actors (local, national and international).

¹⁹ USAID: Concept of Sustainability Approach for RFSA

Motivation: All LSPs are very motivated to continue. Most LSPs derive a reasonable income from LSP and LSP-related activities (either through scale or including connected activities). Only the BSPs and SS have no possibility of deriving a reasonable income from their LSP activities. However, after all these years, there seems to be a SHOUHARDO III Plus “effect” and this needs to be mitigated with appropriate exit strategies.

4.4.1 Resources

The Technical Application refers to Sustained Resources as: “ - with linkages in place, as well as skills building to continuously enhance their crafts, the LSPs will seek to be in-the-know by accessing resources (such as training opportunities) from the private and public sector²⁰”.

LSPs state that they generally have no problem accessing quality inputs/products from either government agencies or private vendors, except when there are stock shortages (vax, health inputs) or temporary issues (transport, ...).

However, SA and FFH often mention a lack of financing. SAs as they have to pre-order and buy stock before being able to sell. FFH have particularly high demand for financial and infrastructure resources as they need good quality ponds, which are expensive to rent and maintain.

There are a few mentions of SHOUHARDO III Plus giving LSPs some professional tools and telephones to assist with their activities.

4.4.2 Sustained Capacity

The Technical Application refers to Sustained Capacities as “an investment of more than two years to building the technical capacities and entrepreneurship skills of LSPs, to equip them to be competitive in their field of expertise in service delivery” with no further details.

Most LSPs mention receiving an adequate mix of training, many through government agencies with a few additional days’ training with SHOUHARDO III Plus.

Several LSPs mentioned not using smart phones, nor the relevant Apps, even though the other LSPs mention that this is very useful to them, their clients and their suppliers. The lack of smart phone and App usage does not seem to be gender or geographically biased. One LSP mentioned not receiving App training from SHOUHARDO Plus.

4.4.3 Linkages

The Technical Application refers to Sustained Linkages as connecting LSPs to the government and private sector and so as to communicate freely if they need any assistance.

“With a solid linkage in place, the LSPs can communicate on their successes and challenges, as well as seek opportunities for relevant support such as accessing technical advice on certain issues that they face in service delivery. The program will, at the same time, ensure that the LSPs use digital services and have access to essential apps such as Krishoker Janala, Fosholi, and Livestock Dairy to continue learning about up-to-date agricultural information and technology.”

The quantitative survey indicates that many households received agricultural services in the past 12 months from: LSPs (70%), Government (30%), Private sector (29%) and NGOs (14%) with a high satisfaction rate (from 91% for private sector to 99% for LSPs).

SHOUHARDO III Plus has created communication channels among the many service providers. Among the LSPs as well as with the officers from different government agencies and private sectors during meetings organized by SHOUHARDO III Plus.

²⁰ Technical Application, page 21

LSPs refer to asking each other for advice when dealing with specific problems (livestock diseases, agricultural issues, etc.).

All LSPs report having good contacts with Upazila government agents and private suppliers and having more opportunities to exchange views with service providers from various government agencies and the private sector.

4.4.4 Motivation

The Technical Application refers to Sustained Motivation as “a demand for services in place and a fixed service charge so that the LSPs will strive to deliver services in PEP communities, providing them timely, tailored, and relevant services for their livelihoods and nutrition needs, among others”.

Most LSPs state that SHOUHARDO III Plus support gave them a boost to their credibility in their communities and enabled them to increase their activities. Here a few statements that reflect their general appreciations:

One SA stated that *“my existing profession gives me the scope to carry a decent livelihood with reasonable earnings and this motivates me a lot.”* Through this profession, he is *“able to maintain a good network and liaisons with different stakeholders like Govt. Agricultural officials, private companies, farmers and clients. I am proud to call myself an LSP.”*

One FFH from Kashem Bazar, Mistree Para Village, Kurigram District stated: *“After being associated with SHOUHARDO, I advise people on fish farming. I am able to earn good money by producing and selling fish fry and my respect has increased”.*

4.4.5 Government and private stakeholders

Generally, there seems to be a different perception of relationships between LSPs and Government authorities. All the LSPs state they have good relationships with their government counterparts (particularly for livestock and health) and are able to access them fairly easily, especially by phone. Perhaps half of the government counterparts interviewed mention knowing about the SHOUHARDO III Plus Activity but state to not be sufficiently involved/informed and have no or little interaction with the LSPs. This is perhaps because the LSPs access lower-level government staff. One recurring comment made a few times by government officials is that: *“It would be great if the messages of our services could be disseminated by SHOUHARDO”*, probably meaning the LSPs.

Many government officials mention the lack of human resources in their departments to successfully service their communities and depend on others to assist them. They also mention the use of specific Apps (Fisheries, others) to assist the LSPs and their clients.

Private stakeholders all indicated to be satisfied with the SHOUHARDO III Plus activity and their interactions with the LSPs.

4.5 Sustained Service Delivery, Access and Demand

The second and last level of Exit Strategies toward a Sustained Impact of is that of ensuring sustained Service Delivery, Access and Demand. In SHOUHARDO III Plus this is defined as “strengthening sustainability by equipping LSPs with entrepreneurial skills for maximum service provision, continuously assessing gaps in service delivery, engaging relevant stakeholders for remedial action, and supporting the LSPs in catering to the needs of PEP communities by providing tailored, inclusive, and women-friendly services.”

67% of household received some sort of formal support from the government or union parishad over the last 12 months, against 14% from NGOs.



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LSPs

All LSPs state serving women and men equally and this is reflected in the quantitative findings. Several LSPs (especially SAs) state that their clients only deal with them and will not go to anyone else.

Most areas are well provided with LSP services. There was only one VX complaining of an over-abundance of service providers (9) which is more than the demand making the situation too competitive. There were a few cases reporting a shortage of LSPs, particularly Health Agents. There were several mentions of LSPs not being from their community and that they have to wait after calling them to get service. They think the number of LSPs is insufficient compared to the needs in their communities and they would prefer LSPs from their own community so that they can access them easily as they sometimes need to wait a long time to receiving service.

Most VSLA are women's groups though there are a few cases with men and adolescent groups. VSLAs are in great demand but there may be difficulties in filling the gap (too low LSP income, need to travel far and with too much luggage (mats, etc.). One very motivated SS said that: *"she is yet unable to create groups in other villages due to travelling problems. Her husband also discourages her to continue this work as she does not get much by doing this work compared to the time she gives. She also needs boxes to keep all the savings, sitting mats during meetings etc."*

One SA mentioned that: *"a license is required to sell fertilizers and pesticides, but not required to sell seeds yet. That's why it is easy to sell seeds only. Meanwhile, to increase the income level and legal source of income LSPs need documentation and license. So, if the SHOUHARDO Team and Government officials support us to acquire the license, it would be a great help"*.

Several FFH mentioned that *"business capital needs to be increased to provide regular services. More fish fry needs to be produced, as the demand is high. Many times I cannot supply enough fish fry to meet the demand. It would be useful to have financing from banks or NGOs."*

Several times, there were suggestions for better ICT use for learning and information gathering and for reducing travelling: *"if the farmers could be reached online or via a mobile device, and the answer could be provided right away after consulting the app."*

Public Service Providers

All government officials have had meetings with SHOUHARDO III Plus, though with mixed results with some knowledgeable and supportive and others much less so. One Community Health Care Provider (CHCP) mentions that *"he is not aware if the public health field staff Family Welfare Visitors (FWV) and Health Assistant (HA) had any contacts with SHOUHARDO. The adolescent girls come here to take service are sent by the SHOUHARDO staff."* He does not know much about the LSPs but heard about the vaccinator and the seed agent. He has no knowledge about the PCSBA and the Blue Star working in the area, and therefore he does not need to provide support to these LSPs. *"SHOUHARDO should not arrange activities during the weekend as everyone wants to spend some time with his or her family"*.

Village Development Committees (VDCs)

VDCs are providing a valuable service, especially to the PEP and occasionally they state that the Union Parishad does not pay much attention if a VDC member goes alone and therefore 2-3 VDC members go together to the Union Parishad.

Generally, VDCs indicate to have very good relationships with the LSPs: *"According to the VDC president, there is no problem for the people in getting services from the LSPs or the public service provider. The only challenge they face is availing the services during rain and flood due to poor transport services."*

The quantitative survey reveals that the VDCs main benefits to both PEP and Non-PEP are accessing UP and NBD services and providing assistance and advice (40-50%). Generally non-PEP have received more services from the VDCs, sometimes very significantly (3 times more for Locally led initiatives and Linkage with private companies/LSPs). 27% of either group did not receive any VDC assistance. There is a sharp contrast for reporting GBV cases (5% for PEP and 0% for Non-PEP). The level of satisfaction with the VDCs is 94% with 6% neutral.

4.6 Gender

By all accounts SHOUHARDO III Plus and LSPs have done very well to empower women and girls. LSPs make a special effort to reach women, especially if their shops are in the middle of the market, where women have access difficulties. Adolescent girls now receive better health service and are sometimes organized in Adolescent Girls' groups.

Where there seem to be a deficit in men's access to services, it is the unmet demand for men VSLAs, or at least more inclusion of males in VSLA activities.

A few testimonies reflect the larger appreciation:

From one PEP FGD: *"there has been a positive change in women's participation in various economic activities in the area, women's mobility, going outside when necessary, maternity health care, etc.. and now women also go to the market to sell vegetables. They have economic empowerment along with the decision-making authority to some extent like paying the tuition of their children and purchasing any necessary items or objects for the households"*.

One male SA: *"women can certainly play the role of LSP. If they want, they can continue the business of selling seed sitting in the market or from home. Recently many women have been earning by selling seeds or vegetables"*.

One FFH: *"his wife is also a business partner; she prepares fish food and his business runs with the cooperation of both men and women"*.

Table 7: Gender findings and comments about LSPs

LSPs	Current situation	Gender Comments
SA	Mostly men	Perhaps difficult for women due to the traveling required and the lifting of heavy loads
FFH	Mostly men	Likely difficult for women due to the traveling required and the lifting of heavy loads
CO	Mostly men	Possible for women at village/local level, but also lifting heavy loads
VX	Many men and some women	Requests for more women VX for small livestock, as many men leave for 6 months at a time and some women do not want receive service from men
SS	All women	Unlikely to suit men as it is very low compensation and deals mostly with women clients
BSP	Mostly men	Requests for more women BSPs as they work in a female/family context
PCSBA	All women	No change

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The project is achieving many of its objectives, as measured by the indicators, except for the infant nutrition aspects. All the PEP report a general improvement in their quality of life and all LSPs are well on their way to sustainably service their communities.

With regard to the four pronged SHOUHARDO III Plus Theory of Change, the Activity has done particularly well for increasing resilience and on-farm opportunities, reducing social exclusion and discriminatory gender norms and increasing access to markets and public and private services and products. The general price increase has mitigated its effect on the nutritional status of vulnerable populations. Other than the VSLAs, its performance for improving financial systems and actors and diversifying livelihood opportunities at scale is unclear.

Sustainability of SHOUHARDO III Plus Outcomes: Some of the performance Indicators, such as technology adoption, yield, and access to markets, consistently show results that are on par with or improved as compared to previous years. There is a noticeable improvement in certain cases, such as the value of annual sales and the women's decision-making score. These positive trends underscore the sustainability of the outcomes achieved through SHOUHARDO III Plus.

Sustainability of local Service Provisioning: Even with the constraints of fewer resources and reduced staff in SHOUHARDO III Plus compared to SHOUHARDO III, it is appreciable to note that about 69% of individuals have been served by Local Service Providers (LSP). This achievement is remarkable considering that the LSPs focus their presence and services on regions not already catered to by public or other private providers.

Impact of Price Hikes: The escalating costs of essential commodities remain an alarming issue. Although this trend is witnessed globally, it is imperative for the program to proactively address its ramifications. Such price hikes deeply impact gender outcomes and the overarching food security of families, which could, in turn, challenge the sustainability of the SHOUHARDO III Plus Activity. It's essential to note that the current design of SHOUHARDO III Plus and its sustainability strategy do not accommodate direct interventions. Hence, strengthening connections to social safety nets might be the most strategic recourse at this juncture.

Overall sustainability of LSP: Enhancing the capacity of Local Service Providers (LSPs), establishing market linkages and access, fostering Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), and facilitating access to finance is paramount. Strengthening these key initiatives can empower LSPs as well as foster sustainability.

But, as always, there seem to be a few weaknesses or gaps and the project could consider a few refinements, as proposed in the following recommendations.

Recommendations from the survey participants

1. While most training was planned, it may not have always been executed by SHOUHARDO III Plus. Given the growing demand for future LSP training, it is vital for SHOUHARDO III Plus to devise a sustainable strategy that allows LSPs to access relevant training without incurring excessive costs.
2. A significant number of LSPs, notably the Seed Agents and Fish Fry Hawkers, require credit to expand their businesses. SHOUHARDO III Plus can serve as a bridge, linking these LSPs to financial institutions, ensuring they secure the necessary credit at reasonable interest rates.
3. Additionally, SHOUHARDO III Plus can cater to the PEPs requesting further training for income-generating activities, particularly in the more isolated rural regions.
4. There is also a voiced need for more female LSPs in specific roles, such as VX for small livestock and HA. SHOUHARDO III Plus can actively support these areas in their efforts.
5. Lastly, SHOUHARDO III Plus can assist VX and SA LSPs in becoming officially registered or certified with their UP and the pertinent government departments.

Recommendations from the external consultant

6. Considering the positive statements about ICT use by many LSPs, SHOUHARDO III Plus might study how effective they really are and implement initiatives to improve them and overcome the barriers to more and better use by LSPs, especially by women. This might include to support LSPs to disseminate the use of the Apps to their customers.
7. In areas where service provision is generally inadequate, particularly for VX, SA and HA, SHOUHARDO III Plus might consider expanding LSP service provision. For example, ensuring that there is at least one LSP per unit area/unit population and if more than one LSP is needed, that there preferably be at least 1 female LSP. For example at least one PCSBA in each ward and three VX in each Upazila (suggested by KII respondents).
8. As the qualitative survey indicates that three districts reported significant use of LSP by Non-PEPs, enhancing LSP sustainability, SHOUHARDO III Plus could study the phenomena so as to replicate it in the other districts.
9. Considering the positive impact of LSPs, could SHOUHARDO III Plus develop a system for: a) strengthening current LSPs and b) self-propagation of new LSPs, post SHOUHARDO. For example through a formal LSP network, and also testing and certification.
10. The Sanchay Sathi LSPs and VSLAs seem to also have had a very positive social and economic impact, especially for women. SHOUHARDO III Plus might consider linking them to a national or regional system to sustainably support VSLAs, increase their numbers and assist them to access more institutional financing, as is done in some African countries.

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