



# Bangladesh

## A History of Poverty and Vulnerability

Bangladesh is one of the world's most populous and population-dense countries and has historically suffered from food insecurity and overall vulnerability. Nearly half of the country's population of 150 million lives below the poverty line, and over 40 percent of Bangladeshi children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition. Furthermore, acute malnutrition has recently shown a disturbingly rapid increase (17 percent) after decades of decline.

Today, 85 percent of the population of Bangladesh lives in rural areas and continues to depend largely, whether directly or indirectly, on agriculture for its livelihood. However, the lack of adequate infrastructure and presence of low-lying crops and homes increases vulnerability to flooding and loss of agricultural land. Cyclones, floods and other environmental devastation continue to hamper long-term efforts to tackle some of these challenges. In addition to these environmental challenges, social, economic and political factors have limited the reach of international economic assistance.

## PROSHAR Promotes Sustainable Livelihoods and Well-Being

ACDI/VOCA's main activity in Bangladesh has worked to improve the well-being and



sustainability of rural communities. In May 2010, we began implementing the \$45 million, five-year **Program for Strengthening Household Access to Resources (PROSHAR)**, a USAID-funded Title II Multi-Year Assistance Program. PROSHAR is an integrated initiative that promotes sustainable livelihoods, improved health and nutrition and enhanced ability to respond to shocks. ACDI/VOCA is responsible for overall program success as well as specific interventions for improving livelihoods and commodity management, while PROSHAR's subrecipient, Project Concern International (PCI), is the technical lead for the health, nutrition and disaster risk reduction objectives.

Each of the three facets of PROSHAR—livelihood, nutrition and risk reduction—has

distinct strategies. The program's livelihood activities include the creation and strengthening of farmer groups as well as the introduction of improved seeds, livestock and fish varieties. Training has played a central role, helping farmers increase their levels of expertise while also fostering better connections to producers for long-term growth. In this way, facilitators have emphasized knowledge transfer among rural communities. In addition, livelihood activities promoted off-farm income generating enterprises, such as clothing embroidery.

The health and nutrition component of PROSHAR focuses on the provision of highly nutritious foods to pregnant and lactating women and their children, coupled with improved access to health services. Just as in the livelihood component, knowledge transfer via the dissemination of key health-related behavior-change messages has had a significant impact on beneficiaries' well-being.

The program's disaster risk reduction activities are designed to build household, community and government institutional capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters. With over \$1 million in counterpart funding from the Bangladeshi government, the project team will also focus on creating infrastructure as part of its disaster risk reduction strategy.

Through this multifaceted approach, PROSHAR has already had an impact on 73,000 unique beneficiaries. However, the program's sights are set on achieving even greater results. PROSHAR anticipates providing agricultural sector productivity

training to over 40,000 people, nutrition support to over 26,000 children and disaster risk reduction support to over 13,000 people.

### **Building on the Foundation of PROSHAR for Future Opportunities**

Although PROSHAR is our only current activity in Bangladesh, we are collaborating with USAID on future areas of agricultural assistance. Bangladesh has also been identified as one of USAID's 19 **Feed the Future (FtF)** countries. As a result, USAID anticipates providing \$50 million in FtF funds for development programs in Bangladesh in 2013. ACDI/VOCA has already submitted a proposal for one FtF program in Bangladesh, the Agricultural Value Chains (AVC) Program.

Given the potential for natural disasters such as cyclones in ACDI/VOCA's implementation area, we will also be prepared to seek emergency and disaster-related funding through other funding sources, such as the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), to improve local capacity to prepare for and recover from disasters.

ACDI/VOCA is proud of the positive results we have already seen in PROSHAR's work to reduce vulnerability to shocks, improve health and boost household incomes in Bangladesh. Over the coming years ACDI/VOCA will continue to seek opportunities to support local communities in the small but populous South Asian country.

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