

## Capability Statement of RDRS Bangladesh

### About RDRS

RDRS Bangladesh has been working for rural development by empowering the rural poor in northwest Bangladesh for over 52 years. RDRS was formally established as the Bangladesh field program of the Geneva-based Lutheran World Federation/Department for World Service (LWF/DWS) on 8 February 1972 to provide relief, rehabilitation, and development assistance to the war-affected people in northwest Bangladesh. The Cooch Bihar Refugee Service (CBRS), which assisted thousands of people fleeing from the war-ravaged Rangpur-Dinajpur region to adjoining Cooch Behar in India during the War of Liberation in 1971, is the forerunner of RDRS.

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| Legal status                                    | Registered under:   | NGO Affairs Bureau                        |
|   | Registration no:  | 003                                       |
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| Name of the legal holder with phone & email ids | Tapan Kumar Karmaker<br>Executive Director<br>RDRS Bangladesh<br>Cell: 01730328001<br>Tele: +88 02 58957072<br>Skype: tapan.karmaker4<br>E-mail: <a href="mailto:executive.director@rdrsbangladesh.org">executive.director@rdrsbangladesh.org</a> |   |
| Total Number of Staff                           | 3655 (Female - 1066 and Male-2589)  |   |
| Bank details of Foreign Account                 | Name of the Bank: Standard Chartered Bank<br>Account No: 01 1093711 01<br>Full address of the Bank: SCB House, 67 Gulshan Avenue<br>Gulshan, Dhaka –1212, Bangladesh  |   |

### Vision

A just and peaceful society where citizens live in dignity, free from poverty, distress, and ignorance in a sustainable environment.

### Mission

RDRS works with disadvantaged and marginalized communities and their organizations to empower them, make them resilient, and ensure sustainable improvements in their lives with dignity.

### Core values

RDRS's core values are:

- **Compassion:** We essentially feel and are motivated to relieve the suffering of our -program participants, and thus design and implement actions accordingly, in all our actions to our disadvantaged and marginalized program participants, particularly the women, children, youth, and minorities.
- **Commitment:** We promise to design and implement our program actions equitably, professionally, and efficiently
- **Innovation:** We develop and implement innovative approaches and technology, relevant to local context and culture, to apply in boosting the people's livelihoods and coping methods
- **Adaptability:** We continuously learn and adapt our approaches and intervention as relevant to the emerging trends and needs to ensure our program objectives and the organization's mission is effectively achieved.
- **Accountability:** Core to our integrity, we ensure transparent operations and feedback mechanisms, and are answerable for all our actions to the people we seek to serve, our donors, and society.

## RDRS Strategy

### Strategic Objectives

- Boost youth engagement and contribution at local and national levels by promoting their agency, and supporting them with youth-friendly services, and protection from violence and harassment.
- To improve access for youth and adolescents to quality information, services, skills development, and livelihood opportunities to lead healthy, productive, and engaged lives.
- Strengthen and sustain CBOs' capacity, through good governance, accountability, and access to services, and establish rights of the marginalized people, especially women, minorities, and the disabled.
- Reduce eye diseases; mitigate the spread and impact of communicable diseases and lessen non-communicable diseases.
- Increased access to maternal health services for poor families, particularly women, and children
- Enhance/Foster equitable and quality education, particularly at the primary level.
- Contribute to ensuring national food and nutrition security.
- Enhance the resilience of disaster and climate-change-affected communities.
- Income generation for microfinance clients (particularly women and marginalized groups) through access to financial services, and enterprise promotion
- Enhance competency for microfinance clients in the management of income and savings at the individual, household, and enterprise levels.
- Develop and introduce client-centric diversified financial products for RDRS MF clients and contribute to the increased financial sustainability of the organization.
- Strengthen resilience building and community-led emergency response and inclusive humanitarian response.

### Thematic Program Priorities

RDRS is implementing its 6th strategic Plan for 2023-2027 which is formulated through exercises to examine the relevance of the thematic priority area of RDRS. The exercise has taken into consideration the government of Bangladesh's priorities, relevant policies, the SDGs, emerging needs, and changing landscape in the development and humanitarian sectors. According to the strengths, expertise, and experience, RDRS determines the main program priorities for this strategic period. These are:

- Skills, Employment, and Entrepreneurship
- Social Empowerment
- Agriculture, Food Security & Climate Change

- iv. Microfinance
- v. Emergency & Humanitarian Response

## 1) Skills, Employment, and Entrepreneurship

To Increase youth engagement in local community-based decision-making processes for their own and their communities' positive development along with Increase skills development and employment opportunities for youth and adolescents, RDRS Bangladesh is implementing a couple of projects - Empower youth for resilience building, Socio-economic empowerment with dignity and sustainability (SEEDS), Recovery and advancement of informal sector employment (RAISE), Skill for employment investment program (SEIP), etc.

RDRS is working to develop a skilled workforce through skills training and therefore placing them in productive self and wage employment, which will, in turn, improve their sustainable livelihood.

### Ongoing interventions about Skill, employment, and entrepreneurship-

- Improved livelihoods of youth through soft and market-driven skills development.
- Resilience building and ensuring protection & and inclusion.
- Promote youth governance to transform gender norms and power relations.
- Building resilience to develop the capacity of adolescents, youths, and institutions.
- Empower adolescents and youth with the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values to secure a safe and meaningful life.

### Impacts on Skill, Employment, and Entrepreneurship

RDRS Bangladesh has taken different initiatives through its various interventions, programs, and projects to include vulnerable young men and women for skill development and a remarkable of young men and women have been engaged in different employment generation through enterprise and entrepreneurship for their economic empowerment. Now youth men and women are playing significant roles in the decision-making process in rural areas, after getting the skill training from RDRS, a lot of youth men and women are engaged in self-employment as well as doing jobs in various companies, after getting support from RDRS, youth are earning money, which contributing significantly to improve their livelihoods as well contributing the local economic development, especially in northern Bangladesh and finally contributing to reducing the poverty of Bangladesh.

## 2) Social Empowerment

Under the social empowerment thematic area RDRS is implementing 14 different projects related to Community Based Organization-CBO development, health, and distress, RDRS works to improve the lives of most marginalized people; raising awareness of women's rights; promoting savings, credit, and skills training to improve the livelihoods of the poor, and the emergence of Union Federations which self-managed people's organizations of the rural poor with a vision to build a just and peaceful society where citizens live in dignity, free from poverty, distress, and ignorance in a sustainable environment.

### Ongoing interventions of the sector-

- Participatory needs assessments and development plans for CBO development.
- Capacity building of CBOs, and Local resource mobilization.
- Strengthen CBOs' linkage and network with local administration at the union, Upazila, District, and Divisional levels.
- Addressing communicable and non-communicable diseases.
- Specialized services for eye care and rehabilitation of the blind.
- Safe water, sanitation, and hygiene.
- Psychosocial counseling
- Strengthen the Referral system at the community level.

- Awareness raising on reproductive health and Institutional delivery.
- SRHR awareness raising among adolescents.
- Quality education for children and adolescents
- Capacity building for teachers and SMCs

### Impacts on Social Empowerment

RDRS Bangladesh is implementing 16 different projects under the social empowerment thematic area and a significant change has been happening at the community level, now Dropout children are getting the necessary support from RDRS to return to school, and quality education has been implemented in our working area, community people are getting quality health services from government institute and demand of health service among the community people have also increased.

more than 200 Union Federations got registration from respective government departments and getting different types of economic and social development-related projects from the government and other donors and the private sector, The federation has built the leadership capacity of the local poor among whom remarkable numbers have been engaged in local power structures including local government institutions. They have established their voice for rights and entitlement in government allocation, resources, inclusion for participatory governance, local infrastructure development, women empowerment, and inclusion of disadvantaged groups. It has created a pro-poor democratic governance atmosphere at the grass-roots level.

### 3) Agriculture, Food Security & Climate Change

RDRS Bangladesh is currently implementing 7 different projects under the agriculture, food security, and climate change thematic area, RDRS Bangladesh has long experience to work for increasing the profitability of smallholder farmers by implementing different service and business models in its existing projects and under the core program. RDRS has been working to promote market access and available agricultural services to farmers through establishing different platforms like Rural Sales and Service Centres (RSSC), Farmer Centers (FC), etc. RDRS has been developing the capacity of Local Service Providers (LSP) at Char and remote areas so that they can sell quality agricultural inputs with services among the farmer's groups, RDRS also linked farmers' groups with output markets to get the fair price of agro products, RDRS is implanting various agricultural projects by following value chain approach, RDRS is also working with different national and abroad universities and research organizations for doing different action research about cropping pattern, cropping diversity and varietal performance

#### Ongoing interventions of agriculture, food security & climate change sector-

- Market assessments and Value chain development
- Agricultural diversification toward high-value crop production/processing
- Promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture
- Capacity building of farmers/farming communities: in climate-resilient and updated farming techniques; adaptation and planning
- Increasing agricultural mechanization
- Federation-based Krishi Kendra: linking farmers to market.

### Impacts on Agriculture, Food Security & Climate Change

Different agriculture, food security and climate change related projects of RDRS Bangladesh has been playing a significant role to increase the profitability and production of various agriculture products of small holder farmers, especially in northern Bangladesh, as agriculture is being hampered significantly by climate change effect in the northern Bangladesh, RDRS has developed lot of technique and technologies with farmers and respective government department to reduce the loses by flood and drought, RDRS also worked with IRRI and Harvest Plus to promote the Zinc contained rice, short duration and high productive rice variety, RDRS contributed in crop diversification and intensification and ensuring maximum utilization of fallow land by increasing farmer involvement in crop

diversification process to community, Improvement soil fertility and productivity through promoting the Compost making, liming and green manuring, we also contributed to generate the employment at rural level through agri-entrepreneurship and alternative market system development with union federation

#### 4) Microfinance

To generate income for microfinance clients (particularly women and marginalized groups) through access to financial services, and enterprise promotion RDRS is implementing 11 different development projects under the thematic area of microfinance and employment creation, where RDRS is providing the capacity building training to the clients and linking them with the market and other government and non-government institutions, on the other hand, RDRS microfinance department is providing fund for thousands of local entrepreneurs, which ultimately contributing a lot on local economic development and women empowerment process clients have increased income through self-employment and wage employment opportunities

##### Ongoing interventions of the microfinance sector-

- Increase access and linkage to financial services.
- Entrepreneurship development and strengthening the market linkage.
- Inclusive and sustainable economic growth
- Graduate Microfinance Program
- Employment creation and reduction of seasonal unemployment.
- Linkage with the private sector to support entrepreneurship development.
- Awareness of Safe Migration processes and linkages legitimate recruiters
- Improvement and digitalization of MF Operations

##### Impact of microfinance

Thousands of women are getting financial support from the RDRS microcredit department, RDRS also provides necessary capacity-building training, as a result, rural women are now engaged in various types of income-generating businesses and entrepreneurship, which ultimately improve the livelihoods of rural people and contribute to the overall empowerment process of women.

#### 5) Emergency & Humanitarian Response

To enhance an inclusive humanitarian response for affected vulnerable communities who have equitable access to protection and livelihood assistance, RDRS is implementing three different projects on flood and cold wave response in the north, northeast, and southern parts of Bangladesh, RDRS has a long history of emergency and humanitarian response, RDRS has a couple of initiatives on building the resilience of forcibly displaced Myanmar Nationals and host communities through emergency and COVID-19 response, conserving the environment and peaceful coexistence in Cox's Bazar, emergency support, rehabilitation, awareness building, disaster management & preparedness activities are implemented through different sectors round the year strengthening RDRS external linkages, participation in other networks (AZZECON, ACT Alliance, NIRAPAD, DISASTER Forum, WFP, DCA, CMDRR Forum Bangladesh, etc)

##### Ongoing interventions of the sector-

- Timely and appropriate response mobilized for disaster-affected communities.
- Flood resilient infrastructure development
- Response plan implementation through effective coordination with relevant actors in response implementation.
- Disaster-resilient community infrastructures are established where needed and maintained.
- Solar energy, ICS
- Community risk assessment and DRM plan development

- Flood early warning dissemination
- Emergency response and recovery
- Capacity building of humanitarian staff in humanitarian aid delivery; lifesaving assistance; protection; CBT modalities etc.

### Impact on Emergency & Humanitarian Response

RDRS has a long history to response emergency and humanitarian response, Thousands of poor people have received a lot of cash and input support after different disasters like- floods, flash floods, and cyclones in different parts of Bangladesh, RDRS is also playing a significant role in Cox's Bazar for Rohingya and host community to address their basic needs and increasing their income for better livelihoods.

### RDRS Program Coverage in Bangladesh

|                           |                |                           |                 |
|---------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| • Divisions:              | 07             | • Registered Federations: | 248             |
| • Districts:              | 30             | • Female-led Federations: | 136             |
| • Upazilas:               | 165            | • Federation Members:     | 3,61,414        |
| • Unions:                 | 1230           |                           | (Female 72%)    |
| • Municipalities:         | 85             | • Branches:               | 284             |
| • City Corporations:      | 05             | • Areas:                  | 60              |
| • Programme Participants: | 1,488,071      | • Regions:                | 16              |
| • Federations:            | 406            | • Microfinance Clients:   | 429,838         |
| • Youth Forum:            | 406            |                           | (Female 92.30%) |
| • Youth Forum Member:     | 27628          |                           |                 |
|                           | (Girls 41.73%) |                           |                 |

### Physical Existence of RDRS

**Head Office:** RDRS has its head office in Uttara, Dhaka. The office building of RDRS is a six-story building with a floor area of 3200 square feet per floor. The facilities available in the offices are meeting/training/conference facilities, accommodation, and other utility facilities. RDRS also has six vehicles (4-wheelers) at the head office level.

**Central Coordination Office:** RDRS has its central coordination office in Rangpur. On the Rangpur level, there are separate 4 (4-8 storied) buildings that are allocated for office space, conference room, training venue, and guest house on campus. Most of the sector heads and technical staff are based in this office.

**District Offices:** RDRS has 18 district offices in its working area. Among them, there are 6 districts that have their own 3 to 4 storied buildings including meeting, training, and accommodation facilities. On the other hand, the district office coordinates the activities of all projects that are being implemented in the respective district generally comprised of Upazila offices. The district office is headed by a Regional Manager (Micro Finance) and Project Coordinator who is supported by 3 to 5 technical staff and other services staff.

**Upazila Office:** The Upazila office is headed by the Upazila Project Coordinator and Area Manager (Micro Finance) respectively where available. They are coordinating 5 to 12 field staff and other staff.

**Branch Office:** RDRS has 284 Branch offices that mainly implement MF and SME activities. The branch office is headed by a Branch Manager who supervises 5 to 7 microfinance organizers.

### RDRS Experience in Health

RDRS has vast experience in health activities. RDRS implements tuberculosis, leprosy, and filariasis control, reproductive health, maternal and child care, eye care, and visually impaired rehabilitation programs under its health portfolio.



## Sexual and Reproductive Health support

RDRS provides this support under its core comprehensive program as a strategic focus to support women in sexual and reproductive health. We conduct community outreach and establish linkages with service providers like Community Clinics (CC) and Union Health & Family Welfare (UH&FW) centers for ANC services. RDRS also supports the CCs to activate the Community Groups (CG) and Community Support Groups (CRG) by organizing regular meetings and other interventions. This project covers the districts of the Rangpur division, and the major focus is on the Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts.

## Eye care service

RDRS Bangladesh has an eye care center in the Lalmonirhat district of Rangpur division on its own land & building with full-time doctors and medical staff under its core comprehensive program to provide access to eye care services at subsidized cost for the rural people. RDRS eye care center serves the clients by setting up operation theatre, well-equipped consultation, and diagnosis, and has extended strategic partnerships with other service providers for effective referral.

## Rehabilitation center of the ‘Visually Impaired’ children

RDRS Bangladesh has a rehabilitation center in its own well-constructed building for the ‘Visually Impaired’ children in Lalmonirhat district under their Core comprehensive development program. This center has the capacity to inhabit 30 dwellers. Participants are trained in functional literacy, life skills training, formal education, and skills training in different market-driven trades. This centre also creates linkages to other service providers and within the community & families to create a supportive environment for the visually impaired people for their rehabilitation. RDRS also transfers business start-up support and tools for them while they return to their homes to start their own enterprise and engage in income-generating activities.

## TB control program

It was in 1980, that RDRS started its Tuberculosis Control Program initially at 3 upazila and gradually expanded to all upazila of Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts of Rangpur division. Since December 2003, RDRS as a collaborating partner of the National Tuberculosis Program has taken responsibility for the care of TB patients in Lalmonirhat & Kurigram districts through 14 DOT centers, 22 microscopy centers, 09 gene Xpert centers, 01 X-ray center, and one EQA lab. These 14 DOT centers are established within the Upazila Health Complexes and 8 additional microscopy centers are established in remote char (Sandilands Island) areas. One EQA lab is set up in the RDRS Bangladesh, Lalmonirhat office to ensure quality laboratory services for both the Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts. The population coverage is 3725077. The overall goal of this project is to reduce morbidity, mortality, and transmission of TB until it is no longer a public health problem in Bangladesh.

## Leprosy and Filariasis Control Program (follow-up)

RDRS Bangladesh has been implementing a Leprosy and Filariasis control program in Lalmonirhat and Kurigram District since 1981. RDRS Bangladesh has been doing an awareness-raising program in association with the TB Program. Through these awareness activities, we find out about Leprosy patients and provided anti-leprosy medicine through the help of the health department. We have been developing linkage with other stakeholders for better ulcer care and surgery.

## RDRS Partnership Experience

RDRS has vast experience in partnership management. RDRS has successfully managed several multi-dimensional partnerships between and amongst the donors, technical partners, and other implementing partners. For instance, RDRS is implementing a 9 million euro-funded project “**Sustained Opportunities for Nutrition Governance**” at the Gaibandha and Kurigram districts with Cordaid and funded by the EU. RDRS also implemented another nutrition project “**Suchana**” at the Sylhet division

with other seven development partners funded by DFID, RDRS has implemented a project called **“Health monitoring and advocacy on safe motherhood”** where ICDDR, B was the technical partner and five other partners implemented the project in five geographical locations in Bangladesh where RDRS worked as a Lead organization and the project was funded by Cordaid, the Netherlands.

Another project was implemented in the Gaibandha District named **“Gaibandha Food Security Project for Ultra poor Women (GFSUP)”** where the technical partner was ICCO and 7 implementing partners including RDRS as the Lead organization. The project was funded by the EU. The major four components of the project Livelihood, Health, Nutrition & leprosy, Disability, and DRR were accomplished effectively.

The project titled **“Enhancing the Impact of Decentralized Seed Production (DSP)”** funded by DFID was implemented where RDRS was the Lead implementing partner along with six partners and World Fish Centre, Bangladesh Agricultural University, and the University of Sterling were the technical partners. The project was named “Poverty Elimination through Rice Research Assistance (PETARRA)” where RDRS was the implementer along with eight other implementing organizations. It was technically supported by BRRI, BAU, and DAE and funded by DFID-IRRI. The project **“Promotion of Food Security through Soil Fertility Management in Hilly Areas”** under the Food Security-Soil Fertility component 2006 was implemented by RDRS as the Lead organization along with three other implementing partners. The project was funded by Bangladesh Government and the EU.

Another project was implemented in Kurigram District named **“Vulnerable Group Development for Ultra Poor Project (VGUP)”** where RDRS was the lead implementing partner along with three partners and TLMB and CDD are the technical partners. The project was funded by the EU and the Department of Women and Children Affairs is the Lead Agency. The major three interventions of the project like Training (Awareness and skill development), Cash subsistence allowance, and IGA selection.

## RDRS Community Development and Community-Based Organization Development Experience

RDRS has 406 grass-root levels CBOs named Union Federation. A Union Federation is a development-oriented non-political local organization established and led by landless, small, and marginal farmers, poor, extremely poor, and disadvantaged people including the indigenous people living in the respective union. Youth and Women Forum are two vital wings of each Union Federation. Women Rights Unit in collaboration with the Social Organization Unit is facilitating these two wings to implement activities at the grassroots to combat violence against women, gender, and child issues. Out of 406 Union-Based Federations, 248 were registered with the Social Welfare Department of Bangladesh. RDRS is operating a rehabilitation center for girls and women survivors of different violence and mainstreaming them by promoting marketable skills and self-help income generation activities. Many violence-affected women and girls have been rehabilitated in mainstream society with the help of the Federation. Through these efforts, RDRS has been awarded the “Good Practice” Award 2012 from the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and UNFPA for reducing violence against women.

## Financial Management of RDRS Bangladesh

Apart from the major task of managing affairs on a day-to-day basis, financial management in RDRS is about taking action to ensure the financial health of the organization. Finance & Accounts has been developed in line with RDRS’s overall vision and mission and in conformity with the following principles:

- RDRS operates in a competitive environment where donor funds are increasingly scarce. It is vital to ensure scarce resources are properly used to produce maximum benefit for the intended focus group.



- RDRS recognizes that internal and external risks that threaten operations and survival must be addressed in an organized way to limit potential damage.
- Financial Management is part of overall management and must look at how the whole organization is financed in the medium and long term, not just focusing on projects and programs.
- Financial Management involves close attention to the organization's objectives without bias and seeks to ensure proper integration with different programs and units.

RDRS has an efficient and well-developed finance and accounts system, which is budgeting and accounting for all project indicators/budgets in the annual Work plan as well as maintaining separate budgets and accounts for all projects.

RDRS Finance Department is using computerized accounting software ACCPAC (SAGE ERP 300 version 6.2) by professional and experienced finance staff.

## RDRS experience on Climate change adaptation and disaster resilience.

Climate is changing and becoming more unpredictable every year in Bangladesh which causing more and more frequent and destructive natural disasters in Bangladesh. The major disasters concerned here are the occurrences of floods, cyclones and storm surges, flash floods, drought, tornados, riverbank erosion, and landslides. RDRS program strives to encourage and facilitate Community-based disaster preparedness and climate adaptation approach. The major initiatives are:

**Community-based disaster preparedness and climate adaptation:** RDRS has adopted a Community-based disaster preparedness and climate adaptation approach by the formation of the Village Disaster Management Committee (VDMC) and Climate Change Adaptation Group (CCAG) to promote disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation & mitigation measures. These approaches are increasingly important elements of vulnerability reduction and disaster management strategies. They are associated with a policy trend that values the knowledge and capacities of local people and builds on local resources, including social capital. VDMC and CCAG may be instrumental not only in formulating local coping and adaptation strategies but also in situating them within wider development planning and debates. In theory, local people can be mobilized to resist unsustainable (vulnerability-increasing) forms of development or livelihood practices and to raise local concerns more effectively with political representatives.

**Flood and drought-tolerant rice cultivation:** One of the visible effects of climate change in our working area has been the increase in the number and intensity of natural disasters such as floods and drought. Now flash floods have become more common than submerged rice fields for 1-2 weeks. Traditional rice varieties can last 4-6 days underwater, whereas new flood-tolerant rice varieties (BRRI dhan51, BRRI dhan52, Binadhan-11, and Binadhan-12) can withstand submergence for up to 15 days. In 2009 RDRS, with IRRI-BMGF assistance under the "Stress Tolerant Rice for Poor Farmers in Africa and South Asia (STRASA)" project took the first initiative to promote these varieties and it is continuing on a large scale. In 2014, 1160 demonstration plots were established among new farmers. Water scarcity is the most severe limitation to the productivity of rice in drought-prone areas. Around one million hectares of land in Bangladesh is drought-prone. IRRI along with BRRI has developed two drought-tolerant rice varieties (BRRI dhan56 and BRRI dhan57) that are not only drought tolerant but also short-duration nature with high yielding despite the lack of water. These varieties can survive 25-30 days of drought from September to October. It can be harvested within 110-120 days also high yielding in nature (4.0 to 4.5 tons ha<sup>-1</sup>).

**Sweet pumpkin cultivation in sandbar:** Usually sandbars are sandy and infertile and not easy to grow any crops successfully. But by introducing an innovative technique, sweet pumpkins can grow in sand bars. RDRS is extending the technology in the chars of Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, and Rangpur districts through various projects.

**Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD) Technology:** Irrigation has become a very costly input in rice production because of the increasing cost of fuel. Farmers pay about 25-30% of the price of their harvest for irrigation. For producing 1 kg of paddy, it is estimated that a farmer has to use 3-4 thousand liters of water for maintaining pond water during the growing stage of plants. As a result, besides the increased cost of irrigation, the groundwater level is also declining due to excessive withdrawal threatening the environment. So, RDRS is implementing water-saving techniques in rice cultivation which is called alternate wetting and drying (AWD). In 2014, 700 AWD technologies were established in the Boro rice field with proper training. The finding of demonstration plots indicates that the number of irrigations used by AWD technology showed, on average, short-duration varieties like BRRI dhan28 received 11 irrigations in AWD practice from vegetative to reproductive stage, whereas in the case of farmers' practice, it was 15. As a result, about 4 irrigations were saved compared to the farmers' practice. Similarly, for long-duration varieties like BRRI dhan29 on average 6 irrigations were saved during the Boro season. Comparative water used under AWD and farmers' practices showed that for short-duration variety, about 22% of water was saved, whereas 26% was saved for long-duration variety. Besides, AWD-practiced farmers got slightly better yields than traditional farmers.

**Homestead plinth rising:** People of low-lying areas are seriously affected by floods which sometimes occur 2-3 times per year. As a result, the homestead assets of poor people are destroyed along with tubewell and sanitary latrines. From this perspective, raising the homestead level by 1 meter, using earth can enable them to withstand raised flood levels and thus protect their assets.

**Solar home system and improving cooking stove:** Still many villages of char areas are not linked to the electricity grid and have no access to electricity in any form. In the Solar Home Systems Program, individual homes are given photovoltaic (PV) collectors for their roofs, from which batteries can be charged to run simple lights, appliances like a small TV, radio, or cassette player, or to charge cellular phones. Besides homes, they can also be used to light shops, fishing boats, etc. As opposed to conventional electricity, the client can enjoy the fact that there will be no monthly bills, no fuel cost, very little repair, and maintenance cost (authorized suppliers provide free monthly checkups during the warranty period), easy installation, and portability. So, RDRS is cautiously promoting the Solar Home Systems Program in char areas.

**Restoration and conservation of biodiversity:** Only a few patches remain of the forest of Sal trees that originally covered Bangladesh, and many are under threat from encroaching villages. To minimize damage, RDRS were implementing the project 'Restoration and Conservation of Biodiversity in Singra Sal Forest', to bring together local villagers and the Forestry Department in the Singra National Park near Dalagram. A Co-management Council was set up involving local people from 9 Forest User Groups, Community Patrol Groups, Federations, and eco-club of school students. Through the Federation and Group, a revolving loan fund was established for the forest communities.

**Emergency response:** RDRS Bangladesh provided emergency support to flood-affected people, especially in the northwest namely Kurigram, Rangpur, Gaibandha, and Jamalpur districts. Flood is a common phenomenon in northwest Bangladesh. RDRS always took immediate initiatives to respond to the floods, in coordination with the local administration, and distributed emergency food packages, fortified biscuits, and NFI among the affected populations.

## RDRS experience in Women's empowerment, safety net, and livelihoods

RDRS is always focused on reducing the vulnerability of women in society and carries women considering empowerment, promoting access to men, women, and girls at all levels of social structure from its inception. RDRS is built on the participatory rights-based approach to ensure sustainability through capacity building of federations, and their networks, and strengthening local governance to address the root causes of poverty and the institutionalization of regular interaction between local authorities (LAs) and local communities to increase popular participation in local governance. RDRS has carried out development interventions aimed at indigenous minorities and physically challenged

people to promote their skills, awareness, and capacities for better livelihoods. Participation, equality, rights, good governance, sustainability, and innovation were the main priorities of RDRS' intervention.

**1) VGDUP (Vulnerable group Development for Ultra-poor):** A joint project financed by the European Commission Delegation, Dhaka Bangladesh, Department of Women Affairs of Bangladesh in Kurigram District (all upazilas) for 20,000 Ultra-poor women. The primary duration of the project was 30 months starting January 2009 to June 2011. The overall objective was "to contribute to the reduction of the level of deep-rooted poverty and food insecurity in women's department and especially disadvantaged households.

The program components were a) training and capacity building for women participants b) monthly social transfers in cash for subsistence and 3) transfer of productive assets to women participants. The main activities were awareness, literacy, and numeric training at the group level, skill training (on two IGAs according to choose) subsistence allowance (@ tk 500 per month per woman), and asset transfer (@ tk 7000.00 per woman after IGA training).

**2) Gaibandha Food Security Project for Ultra Poor Women (GFSUP):** The GFSUP Project was a 10 million Euro project funded by the European Union and ICCO-The Netherlands, Light for the World, The Netherlands, The Leprosy Mission International (TLM) and RDRS was lead implementing partner along with other 5 implementing and technical partners. The duration of the project was from January 2009 to June 2014. The Specific objective of the project was "Livelihood of Ultra Poor Women and their dependents improved through enhanced Food Security, Income Generating Capacity, Exercise of Human Rights, and Disaster Preparedness in Gaibandha District". The project provided various services, including IGA and access to safe drinking water to the 40,000 ultra-poor women-headed households. With the objective to enhance the food security and livelihoods of the beneficiaries in a sustainable way, the project strategy worked on four livelihood components simultaneously.

**3) Alleviating poverty through Disaster Risk Reduction in the northwest part of Bangladesh:** The project has been implemented by RDRS supported by EC, and DCA in the Kurigram district (2009-2012). The project was for forecasting the community about disaster risk mitigation, disaster management, and preparedness. Gender violence issues are taken part in cross-cutting consideration to resolve this during the disaster. The community-based organizations and local government institutions were engaged to deal with the issues.

**4) Char Livelihood Programme (CLP):** The Chars Livelihood Programme (CLP) is jointly funded by UKaid through the Department for International Development and the Australian Government (AusAid), sponsored by the Rural Development and Co-operatives Division of the Government of Bangladesh's Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives and implemented through Maxwell Stamp Plc.

The Programme was first proposed to DFID in 1996 and was originally conceived as a livestock development project on Bangladesh's northern chars. By the time final Programme Memorandum was signed by the Government of Bangladesh in December 2003 and the CLP began operations in August 2004. The first tire of this program (CLP-1) ran from 2004-2010 and was succeeded by the second (CLP-2) in 2010 & continued up to March 2016. RDRS Bangladesh has been implementing Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) since 2005 in the Kurigram district and continued the 2nd phase in Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, and Kurigram districts accordingly.

The Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) has been improving the life standard of extremely poor people through the comprehensive package program aiming to achieve self-reliance, bidding goodbye to poverty. Bangladesh has made strong progress towards reducing income poverty, placing it roughly on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal target by 2015 and the Chars Livelihoods program plays a vital role to achieve the goal. The program was to "specifically target the 2 million poorest char dwellers 80% of which are estimated to be ultra-poor" out of a wider population of 4.5 to 6.5 million listed as residents in "the primary operating area for the program.

**5) Vocational Education and Training (VET):** The project was funded by ICCO Cooperation and RDRS jointly implemented with ICCO Cooperation. The duration of the project was from November 2014 to September 2016 and the total cost was BDT 114,285,714. The main theme of the project is by enhances access of young men and women to educational services that are payable and relevant for local and international labor markets. It develops market-oriented training together with employers and the agency for vocational education training. It enables the vocational education resource center in the Ministry of Youth, Labour, and Employment to development of training courses based on international standards.

**6) Legal Education and Gender Aware Leadership (LEGAL-II):** RDRS Bangladesh is implementing a project named 'Legal Education and Gender Aware Leadership (LEGAL II)' with the assistance of The Royal Netherlands Embassy, Dhaka for the period of 2006 to 2011 with the goal of "To work towards the elimination of gender-based violence and for the promotion and protection of women's rights in Northwest Bangladesh". The project covers 260 Union of 29 upazilas in Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Panchagarh, and Nilphamari districts. Budget: Taka 79,025,526 with 32,000 HHs.

The important learning was that the deep-rooted vulnerabilities of women and violence against women cannot be reduced without (i) Strong institutional backups at the local /community levels; (ii) Women's empowerment programs that include legal awareness, leadership and capacity development for human rights issues; and (iii) Commitment from local officials, locally elected leaders, and civil society. With the purpose of carrying on women's rights, RDRS exercised an internal assessment to ensure that both organizational and programmatic objectives, approaches, and activities were consistent with this learning.

At the organizational level, the aims and objectives of the LEGAL project have been incorporated into the RDRS five-year (2011–2016) Strategic Plan. LEGAL project interventions are followed by both core development and bilateral projects of RDRS. This is also linked to sustainability issues where the LEGAL project has played a vital role in sustaining its aims, objectives, and interventions.

**7. Reduce Vulnerability of the Poor and Disadvantaged Population due to Climate Change Impacts in the Northwest Part of Bangladesh (CCCP):** The project was funded by PKSF and RDRS jointly implemented with PKSF. The duration of the project was June 2013 to July 2016 and the total cost was BDT 81,736,303. The main objectives of the project; are to strengthen community risk reduction and adaptation capacity to the negative effects of climate variability and Increase household food security and quality of life of poor and disadvantaged women and men. And major tasks- Organize capacity building training for CCAG, Promotion of solar panels, cooking stoves, backyard poultry and goat rearing, flood-tolerant rice, sweet pumpkin cultivation, Installation of tube-well, latrine, Plinth raising, and Promotion of organic farming.

**8) Action for Greater Responsiveness of Nation Building Institutions (AGRONI):** This project was funded by Manusher Jonno Foundation, Bangladesh, and its duration was April 2008-June 2013, and the budget was 75,946,973. The objective of this project is to make service delivery institutions more responsive. Major assignments and tasks are Training for UP leaders and UP Standing Committee members (Education, Health, Agriculture, and Safety-net), Group formation - and meeting/yard meeting, District level Seminar and Advocacy with UP, Upazila health department for strengthening the service delivery system.

**9. Core Comprehensive Programme:** It was a comprehensive program supported by ELCA, CoS, BftW, DCA, ICCO, and LWS from 1976 to December 2022 to achieve an economically and environmentally sustainable society through empowering the disadvantaged to assert their rights, build their capacity and resilience, to ensure good governance and improved access to opportunities, resources, and services. The major objectives of the program are to; Empowered communities asserting their rights and demand justice, further reduced maternal mortality rates, Greater resilience to disaster risk and climate change-affected communities, and major assignments and tasks-: Civil Empowerment, Community Health Programme, and food security & Environment and Improved household food and nutrition status of climate vulnerable communities.

**10. Programme Initiatives for Monga Eradication (PRIME):** PKSF with a view to alleviating monga and economic hardship of the ultra-poor in the greater Rangpur region launched a pilot project entitled “Programmed Initiatives for Monga Eradication (PRIME)” Since June 2007 to December 2015 amount BDT 443,64,810. RDRS Bangladesh worked as a partner organization to implement PRIME at Aditmari Upazila in Lalmonirhat district. Encouraged by the success of the pilot project, PKSF has extended the program for a long term to 35 upazilas in Kurigram, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, and Rangpur districts in 2007 and 2008. RDRS Bangladesh as well as 15 other NGOs has been selected as partner organizations to implement PRIME. Department for International Development (DFID) has come forward to financially support PKSF and its partner organizations in implementing the program.

RDRS Bangladesh has been operating PRIME extended project through 53 branch offices in 14 upazilas in Lalmonirhat, Kurigram and Nilphamari districts since 2007. A total of 1,18,471 ultra-poor households under RDRS working areas were targeted for giving support from the PRIME project. The number of PRIME beneficiaries under RDRS was 69,522.

## RDRS experience of working with LGI and Community

RDRS Bangladesh has long exposure to this very program and is renowned in north-western Bangladesh for its civil empowerment and good governance activities. RDRS maintains a good and strong relationship with all the local government bodies in northern Bangladesh through its core and bilateral program activities and it has vast experience working with union Parishad and community people. RDRS implemented the following project with the union Parishad, at the same time all programs and projects of RDRS were implemented by the direct involvement of community people. The following program is implemented by RDRS with union parishads.

a) RDRS Core Comprehensive Programme supported by Bread for the World (BftW) and Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America (ELCA). The development goal of the project is to achieve an economically and environmentally sustainable society by empowering the disadvantaged to assert their rights, build their capacity and resilience, to ensure good governance and improved access to opportunities, resources, and services. Mainly the project facilitates the 406 CBOs (Union Federation) with the help of local government institutions and government line agencies. The total number of direct program participants in the project is 159,745 and the indirect program participants are 546,245. The project is working with the union parishad for enhancing the rights of the poor people through public hearings, workshops, and dialogue sessions with the union parishad.

b) “Social Economic Empowerment with Dignity and Sustainability (SEEDS)” project funded by Stormme Foundation. The goal of this project is to improve the life of the marginalized Adibashi community through the education and empowerment of adolescents, thus enabling the whole community to improve social and economic conditions and protect their rights. Budget BDT 10,51,64,403; Duration 2014 to 2019. Total program participants 6000 indigenous HHs. SEEDS project follows a family and right-based approach in its intervention for well-being of the vulnerable and disadvantaged people living in remote areas. The project tries to mobilize targeted people to get organized, plan and execute their dreams in cooperation with other stakeholders, increase income, expand assets, advance children’s education, improve situation of the adolescent girls, avail services from diverse sources, etc. The project has already made remarkable progress in achieving its objectives.

c) Strengthening Community-Based Organizations for Pro-poor democratic governance (SCOPE); This project was implemented by RDRS Bangladesh and funded by the European Commission, Danchurchaid (in consortium with the Church of Sweden). The overall objective is- “To promote inclusive and empowered Federations/CBOs to strengthen out-of-reach communities’ participation in poverty reduction and sustainable development”. The Specific Objectives are (1) Establish and build the capacity of Federations/CBOs and their networks for participation in local governance for the attainment of poor people’s rights and services (2) Inform and empower poor men and women to collectively address causes of their economic, social, and political exclusion. A total of 70,000 members of 202 Federation/CBOs and local representatives of 121 Union Parishad under 25 Upazila Parishad of



4 Districts were the targeted beneficiaries of the project. The final beneficiaries were 36,28,687 males and females of the project area who benefited from improved governance practices and allocation of government resources.

d) Strengthening Democratic Local Governance (SDLG) was funded by USAID. The duration of the project was from January 2012 to October 2014. The total cost of the project was BDT 704, 90,281 of which RDRS Bangladesh shared BDT 36, 11,600. The primary beneficiaries were the UP (Union Parishad or Council) Chairman, member (male), member (Female), Upazila Chairman, Vice Chairmen (male), Vice Chairman (Female), Pourshova Chairman, and members. Also, the Citizen Participation Forum (CPF) members were the prospective beneficiaries.

The project increased the participation of citizens, including women and youth, through citizen participation forums, UP Ward Committee members, Standing Committee members of up, and others. To enhance the capacity of Local Government Units – LGUs through providing training and technical assistance. RDRS Bangladesh implemented SDLG project activities in Natore, Pabna District from January 2012 to December 2013 with 46 LGUs. Through the project support, RDRS implemented several activities like rapport building with LGUs, conducting LGCI both in control and treatment areas, a celebration of International Women’s Day in Upazila and District level, planning meetings, formation of CiG, organizing training on roles of CiG, FM&RG, and PSP accordingly. During this project, the period organized a tax fair, word meeting, drama stage, strategic planning & planning workshop, etc. with LGU. All the planned activities were implemented successfully, and the achievement is 100%.

e) Improvement of the Real Situation of Overcrowding in Prisons in Bangladesh (IRSOP): It is a joint project of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Federal Republic of Germany. It is being implemented with the technical support of German Development RDRS Bangladesh is an Implementation partner in Rangpur, Dinajpur, Gaibandha, and Thakurgaon. The overall impact expected from the project is to improve people’s access to justice in Bangladesh, particularly the poor prisoners, women, and children to get accountable, efficient, and effective justice services.

Goal: The project goal is to contribute to reducing overcrowding in prisons by providing legal aid services to indigent under-trial prisoners.

Objectives: The project objectives are to enhance the capacity of paralegals and legal aid services and also to increase the responsiveness of criminal justice agencies and alleviate the pressures on the criminal justice system through paralegal aid services.

Committees of Project to engage priority stakeholders: The project is managed by a Project Steering Committee which includes key stakeholders and an advisory committee and a “Case Coordination Committee” (CCC) at the district level. CCC” committee is a district-level committee jointly chaired by a Learned District Judge and the Honorable DC of the relevant district. The main motto of the committee is to speed up the justice system to reduce case backlog and reduce overcrowding in prisons. Learned judge of Women and children tribunal, Chief judicial magistrate, police super, civil surgeon, public prosecutor, President of district BAR association, ANSAR, BGB, upazila Female vice chairman, social service Officer, Women affairs Officer, DD (Narcotics), Community policing forum president, NGO representative, and GIZ representative are the mentionable member of the committee.

## Other Strengths of RDRS

RDRS has different policies and manuals in place like the Human Resource Manual, Procurement & Store Manual, Finance Manual, Internal Audit Manual, Gender Policy, Child Safeguarding Policy, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy, Whistle Blowing and Complaints Mechanism Policy, Disability Inclusion Policy, Disaster Preparedness, and Response Policy and Outline Strategy, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change (CC) Policy, etc. Accountability and transparency are in-built in RDRS’ vision and mission statement. RDRS always follows its policy and manual for program design and implementation. RDRS has clearly defined who the direct participants/ stakeholders are and the associate participants and set milestones/indicators in its strategic plan. RDRS



arrange regular meetings with different bodies' like- meeting with the Board of Trustees, Sr. staff meeting, and Coordination meeting, and all decisions are made accordingly. Policies and strategies are always revised considering the views and interests of program participants and in line with government and international policies as well as emerging development needs.

#### Approach indicating Sustainability.

- Union apex body "Federation" through networking with all the formed community groups, self-help groups, producer groups, etc. made a strong platform for accessing services from public and private sectors and playing a role in community development.
- Homestead gardening has increased access to nutrition consumption and created additional income at the household level turned to women empowerment. It can continue with their household's regular activities without hampering.
- Group development approach through savings & loan activity and getting motivation through diversified IGA in their group.
- Linkage establishment with the livestock and agriculture department through engagement in project intervention is an effective approach that can be continued even after phasing out.
- Community engagement for Tree plantation, Re-vegetation activities & DRR awareness ensures the community's resilience in adopting climate change.

#### Existing Programme partners:

| Project Name   | Partner                 |
|--|-------------------------|
| RDRS Comprehensive Development Programme   | BftW & ELCA             |
| Empower Youth for Resilience Building  | US Embassy              |
| Market System Development of Safe Poultry & Poultry Products (RMTP)  | PKSF                    |
| Socio-Economic Empowerment with Dignity and Sustainability (SEEDS)   | SF                      |
| NRK Telethon - Child, Not Bride (NRK-CNB) - Bangladesh   | Plan Int. BD            |
| Combating Early Marriage in Bangladesh (CEMB)  | Plan Int. BD            |
| Transforming the Life of Gender-Based Violence Affected Young Women and Girls by Creating Employment Opportunities | Cordaid                 |
| Fight Slavery and Trafficking-In-Persons (FSTIP)   | Winrock International   |
| Out of School Children Education program   | BNFE, GoB               |
| Primary Education for the Disadvantaged Children   | LLT Japan               |
| Early Learners' Activity   | Sesame Workshop - USAID |
| TB Care and Prevention   | Global Fund             |
| The ASHA project   | ICDDR,B                 |
| Alliance for Combating TB in Bangladesh  | ICDDR,B                 |
| Sustained opportunities for Nutrition Governance (SONGO)   | Cordaid -EU             |
| Accelerated the Genetic Gains in Rice (AGGRI)  | IRRI                    |
| Transboundary Flood Resilience Project in South Asia   | ELCA                    |

| Project Name   | Partner                         |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Understanding Farm Management Decision making for increased productivity in the eastern Gangetic Plains (FBIP)   | University of Western Australia |
| Transforming Smallholders Food Systems in the Eastern Gangetic Plain (Rupantar)  | The University of Adelaide      |
| Nutrition in City Ecosystems (NICE)  | SFSA Bangladesh                 |
| Enhancing Resources & Increasing Capacities of poor House Holds towards elimination of their poverty enrich (ENRICH )  | PKSF                            |
| Skills for Employment Investment program (SEIP)  | PKSF                            |
| Kuwait Goodwill Fund for the Promotion of Food Security in Islamic Countries (KGF)   | PKSF-Kuwait Govt.               |
| Learning and Innovation Fund to Test New Ideas (LIFT)  | PKSF                            |
| Small and Marginal Sized Farmers Agricultural Productivity Improvement and Diversification Finance Project (SMAP)  | PKSF-JICA                       |
| Adolescent Programme   | PKSF                            |
| Uplifting the Quality of the Lives of Elderly People Programme   | PKSF                            |
| Bangladesh Rural Water Sanitation and Hygiene for Human Capital Development Project  | PKSF                            |
| Water and Sanitation for Rural Poor of Northern Bangladesh (Water Credit)  | water.org                       |
| Recovery and Advancement of Informal Sector Employment (RAISE)   | PKSF                            |
| Integrated Agriculture   | PKSF                            |
| LWF-RDRS Emergency Program: Building Resilience of Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals and Host Communities through Emergency & COVID-19 Response, Conserving Environment and Peaceful Coexistence in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh | ALWS/DFAT                       |
| Emergency Response (Cox's Bazar)   | DECCB                           |