Lessons Learned from the EEP/Shiree Scale Fund

Synthesis of Scale Fund End of Project Reviews

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This report has been produced by Ecorys UK through the Economic Empowerment of the Poorest (EEP) programme. The views expressed in the report are entirely those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the views of the GoB, DFID, SDC, EEP staff nor of PNGO staff.
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### Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BADC</td>
<td>Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDT</td>
<td>Bangladeshi Taka</td>
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<tr>
<td>BHH</td>
<td>Beneficiary Household</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community Based Organisation</td>
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<td>CCT</td>
<td>Conditional Cash Transfer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>Challenge Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHT</td>
<td>Chittagong Hill Tracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Change Monitoring System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPK</td>
<td>Community Pusti Kormi (health workers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAE</td>
<td>Department of Agricultural Extension</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<td>DLS</td>
<td>Department of Livestock Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>DNI</td>
<td>Direct Nutrition Intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSK</td>
<td>Dushtha Shasthya Kendra</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEP</td>
<td>Economic Empowerment of the Poorest</td>
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<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>Extreme Poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESMPI</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree Multidimentional Poverty Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>GoB</td>
<td>Government of Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEFS</td>
<td>Household Economic and Food Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>HH</td>
<td>Household</td>
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<tr>
<td>HKI</td>
<td>Hellen Keller International</td>
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<td>HSI</td>
<td>HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation</td>
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<td>IAP</td>
<td>Independent Assessment Panel</td>
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<td>IF</td>
<td>Innovation Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>IGA</td>
<td>Income Generating Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>iNGO</td>
<td>International Non Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LLW</td>
<td>Local Livestock Worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSP</td>
<td>Local Service Provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MJSKS</td>
<td>Mahideb Jubo Somaj Kallayan Somity</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>No Cost Extension</td>
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<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>Natural Leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAB</td>
<td>Practical Action Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNGO</td>
<td>Partner Non Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCI</td>
<td>Save the Children International</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDC</td>
<td>Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SETU</td>
<td>Social and Economic Transformation of the Ultra-Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>Scale Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shiree</td>
<td>Stimulating Household Improvements Resulting in Economic Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Technical Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ToR</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical &amp; Vocational Education &amp; Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAO</td>
<td>Upazila Agriculture Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ULO</td>
<td>Upazila Livestock Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>UP</td>
<td>Union Parishad</td>
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<tr>
<td>VGD</td>
<td>Vulnerable Group Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>VGF</td>
<td>Vulnerable Group Feeding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSLA</td>
<td>Village Savings and Loan Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>WASA</td>
<td>Water Supply &amp; Sewerage Authority</td>
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Executive Summary

This report arises as a result of Recommendation 3 in the 2015 DFID Annual Review of the Economic Empowerment of the Poorest (EEP) programme, to consolidate lessons from the 14 Scale Fund (SF) end-of-project reviews into a set of succinct recommendations for future programme design and implementation.

The SF was one of two mechanisms under the broader EEP Challenge Fund which, together with an Innovation Fund (IF), supported projects and interventions with the aim of lifting one million Bangladeshi people out of extreme poverty. Whilst IF projects tested novel approaches to alleviating extreme poverty, the SF took tried and tested interventions to scale, applying these proven approaches to large numbers of extreme poor Beneficiary Households (BHHs). Fourteen Partner Non-Government Organisations (PNGOs) received funding from the SF, across five funding windows: Phase I and Phase II of Round One supported a diverse range of projects in both rural and urban areas; Round Two supported projects working in challenging geographical and cultural areas; Round Three (“Scale Up”) took successful IF projects to scale; and Round Four (“Scale Out”) added additional numbers of beneficiary HHs to existing SF projects.

Each SF project was evaluated between August and December 2015, producing a range of data on the strengths and weaknesses of the different models, and illuminating opportunities and challenges presented by the cultural and geographical particularities of SF project areas. The primary objective of this report is to synthesise the lessons emerging from SF project evaluations, providing concise thematic information for policy makers and practitioners dealing with extreme poverty programme design and implementation, as well as recommendations for future programming.

The report draws on data from the 14 PNGO end of project evaluation reports, as well as interviews with PNGO and EEP/Shiree staff, and a lesson learning workshop held in March 2016. Lessons are categorised into the following seven thematic areas:

- IGA selection;
- Training;
- Asset Transfer;
- Linkage with Government;
- Women’s Empowerment;
- Access to Land; and
- Cross-NGO Learning.

Additional important themes tackled by SF projects – including savings groups and nutrition – will be examined in separate analyses by EEP at a later date, as further data is expected to emerge over the course of the current No Cost Extension (NCE) period.

SF projects generated a broad and rich evidence base because the Challenge Fund model encouraged bottom-up and context-dependent project designs. This current synthesis was limited both in scope and duration, and acknowledges that identifying common themes emerging across SF evaluations will not necessarily capture all of the context- and project-specific lessons. This synthesis of lessons was also limited by the quality of SF project evaluations, which were independently commissioned by PNGOs, and varied in approach, budget, structure and level of analysis.

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1 SF evaluation reports were the primary source of data, supplemented where possible by KIIs with PNGO and EEP staff, and by reviewing initial project designs contained in PNGO project memoranda.
2 The TOR for the consultancy assignment specified 24.5 days in total.
General lessons are first drawn out on two key overarching areas:

- the relevance and appropriateness of project designs, and
- the suitability of the Challenge Fund approach for tackling extreme poverty.

Key findings centre on:

- the importance of project duration;
- the need to look beyond graduation;
- the theoretical coherence of models/approaches;
- analysing needs and applying learning at project design stage;
- breadth of context-specific evidence afforded by bottom-up approaches;
- the merit of NGO partnership models; and
- difficulty of attributing results to a single funding source.

Thematic lessons are then presented in individual chapters designed to be individually packaged as communication briefs for the practitioner community, and to inform the design and implementation of future programmes. The headline lessons and recommendations under each thematic area are as follows:

**IGA selection:**
- Importance of household level micro planning, to ensure IGAs are matched to the particular needs and capacity of BHHs, and to particular geographic contexts.
- Standardising cash/asset package reduces potential inter-HH conflict, and encourages uptake of high potential assets with lower initial values.
- Providing BHHs with more than one IGA helps to smooth consumption and mitigate against shocks; a primary IGA that will generate high returns over the long term, and at least one secondary IGA that provides quicker and safer returns.
- Combining on- and off-farm IGAs can minimise risk and diversifies patterns of seasonal income flow.
- Detailed market analysis should be undertaken prior to proposing IGAs for specific locations.
- The use of technology can facilitate IGA development, if this is both user- and context-appropriate.
- It is important to collect and analyse data on the effectiveness of different types of IGAs in different geographical areas and for different beneficiary profiles.

**Training:**
- Training is more effective when delivered immediately prior to asset transfer, with ongoing, practical refresher trainings to consolidate messages and troubleshoot issues with IGA development.
- On-the-job training and practical demonstrations are more effective than formal, classroom-style training, particularly when aligned with key stages or processes in the IGA cycle.
- Sufficient training budgets and staff-to-beneficiary ratios are required to enable intensive, regular training and facilitation of households. Intensive training requires a higher cost-to-serve per HH, and should be included under direct delivery budgets.
- Transferring business development skills is equally important to providing technical information on IGA management.
- Training materials should take into account literacy and language barriers.
- Strategic partnerships with government, Local Service Providers (LSPs) and the private sector can facilitate the sustainability of skills transfer.
Asset Transfer:
• Livestock should be locally-sourced to reduce mortality risk, and should use bloodlines adapted to local conditions to reduce cost of veterinary care and husbandry.
• Beneficiary-led purchasing can mitigate procurement traps.
• The supplier base should be analysed prior to procurement, ensuring an appropriate route-to-market (private sector, government, locally sourced/'shopping') for quality inputs, timely delivery and at the best price.
• Successful asset procurement is driven by rigorous, realistic and staggered procurement planning, incorporating strategies for mitigating slippage.
• Simple, context-specific procurement guidelines and procurement orientation sessions for staff mitigates procurement risk.

Linkage with Government:
• Involving government on the supply side of EP interventions is equally important to demand-driven advocacy efforts to increase government ownership.
• Group-based advocacy effectively ensures enhanced downward accountability of local government officials.
• Project designs should include specific objectives and indicators related to policy and advocacy activities, to ensure that gains are captured, measured and reported on.
• Successful advocacy requires sustained engagement to build relationships, as well as appropriate messaging as a ‘hook’ for government engagement.
• Promoting access to safety nets is more relevant for elderly, disabled and single-headed households who are less likely to benefit from income generating interventions.

Women's Empowerment
• Programmes should include targeted support for women, and interventions specifically aimed at women's empowerment.
• Gender should be mainstreamed in PNGO operations, including project level gender strategies, gender-focused monitoring and evaluation and recruitment of female management and front line staff.
• Female-friendly IGA selection requires consideration of barriers to women’s participation, including time constraints and cultural barriers.
• Business plans for female beneficiaries should distinguish between asset ownership, management and control, to overcome barriers to economic participation and ensure women’s control over income streams.
• Group-based approaches to social and political empowerment demonstrate success, but gains are maximised when combined with strategic and targeted female-focused economic empowerment interventions.
• Interventions targeted at women should also involve men in training, facilitation and group counselling.

Access to Land
• A long term outlook is required for khas land programming, looking beyond the traditional donor programming cycle.
• Temporary settlement should be the immediate priority, with a view towards long-term permanent settlements where project length allows.
• Temporary leases (of private land) should be formalised and legally-binding, to reduce the possibility for abuse of ‘gentleman’s agreements’ with landlords.
• Land authorities should be involved early on in the project cycle, to garner early support for access to land, focus project activities on unions with available khas land, and support achievement of results during short project durations.
• Strategically planned and multi-pronged advocacy efforts are more effective, engaging central as well as district/union administration, and working with civil society, litigators, and media.
• Building local capacity in the khas land application process increases the sustainability of land advocacy and litigation after project funding ceases.
• Complex land access issues should be approached through a strategic and holistic approach to land access, rather than tackling small parts of a multi-stage process.
• Programme design should acknowledge the catalytic or facilitating role of PNGOs and other development partners, rather than rely too heavily on direct interventions.

Cross-NGO Learning

• Sharing of successful technical innovations provides valuable opportunities for NGOs to improve their services.
• Making linkages between implementing organisations early in the project cycle ensures cross-learning refines and strengthens key processes.
• Within-project learning can be accelerated or supplanted by cross-NGO learning where risks, issues and mitigation strategies are already available within the community of practice, but requires forward-looking, proactive and ongoing lesson learning.
• Regional PNGO coordination meetings were one of the most effective forums to exchange lessons.
• EEP Programme Managers play a key role in facilitating lesson sharing and refining implementation approaches, but this should not replace “bottom up learning” from PNGOs.
## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The “Economic Empowerment of the Poorest” (EEP) Challenge Fund was financed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and implemented by Ecorys UK Ltd in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). EEP’s objective was to lift one million Bangladeshi people out of extreme poverty using two primary mechanisms, a Scale Fund (SF) and an Innovation Fund (IF), supported by research and advocacy work streams. Both funds leveraged the technical, geographical and contextual expertise of organisations with a long track record of working on economic development in Bangladesh, and applied this to tackling the problem of extreme poverty. Whilst the IF looked to test novel approaches to improving the lives of extremely poor households, the SF aimed scale up proven models for sustainably lifting ultra-poor households out of extreme poverty.

The SF ran from March 2009 until December 2015, selecting 14 PNGOs for funding through separate rounds, using a competitive process driven by an Independent Assessment Panel (IAP). Round 1, spanning six years over two phases, covered a broad spectrum of issues facing the extreme poor in urban and rural areas. Round 2 explicitly funded activities in some of the most challenging areas; the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the haor areas, and the southern coastal belt. The third “Scale Up” Round was dedicated to taking innovations proven under the IF to scale. The final “Scale Out” round added additional beneficiary households to existing SF partner projects. The SF rounds are summarised below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Round</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>PNGOs Supported</th>
<th>Number of HHs</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Round 1 | Broad focus; 5 rural projects, 1 urban project | • CARE  
• Practical Action Bangladesh (PAB)  
• Save the Children International (SCI)  
• Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK)  
• Uttaran  
• NETZ | Phase I: 82,850  
Phase II: 96,000 | Phase I: March 2009  
Phase II: April 2012 | Phase I: March 2012  
Phase II: December 2015 |
| Round 2 | Focus on challenging areas – haor, CHT, southern coastal belt | • Oxfam  
• CARITAS  
• Concern Worldwide | 43,000 | September 2011 | December 2015 |
| Round 3 | “Scale Up” – taking Innovation Fund projects to scale | • HKI  
• HELVETAS (HSI)  
• Green Hill  
• Shushilan  
• Mahideb Jubo Somaj Kallayan Somity (MJSKS) | 12,000 | July 2013 | December 2015 |
| Round 4 | “Scale Out” – additional BHHs added to existing SF projects | • Uttaran  
• HIS  
• Oxfam  
• CARITAS  
• CARE  
• DSK  
• SCI  
• NETZ | 48,800 | October 2013 | December 2015 |
The SF was unique in both its scope and heterogeneity. SF projects operated nationwide – in both rural and urban areas, including the challenging geographical and cultural contexts of the CHT, the waterlogged haor region and the disaster-prone southern coastal belts – producing a broad evidence base from which to draw both common and context-specific lessons on ‘what works’ for sustainably alleviating extreme poverty. SF partners targeted the poorest of the poor, including those groups who would prove to be the most difficult to graduate: female-headed households, the disabled and the elderly. Applying proven approaches to developing diversified household-level income streams, SF projects implemented a combination of interventions to tackle the multidimensional nature of extreme poverty:

- asset transfer;
- cash transfer;
- technology transfer;
- enterprise development;
- community group / Village Savings Loan Association (VSLA) development;
- facilitating transferring khas land;
- facilitating basic service delivery;
- improving nutrition;
- linking with government safety nets
- promoting market linkages; and
- strengthening the rights and voice of the extreme poor.

Individual evaluations conducted towards the end of 2015 revealed the overwhelming success of the 14 SF projects at graduating households out of extreme poverty, as defined by a common list of criteria established by EEP.³

SF projects demonstrated impressive results for beneficiary households across a range of indicators including: increased income, expenditure and savings; increased economic status and decreased subjective experience of extreme poverty; enhanced and diversified income earning opportunities; accumulation of assets; increased access to productive land; reduced number of food coping strategies and better dietary diversity; improvement in settlement conditions (housing and access to electricity, latrines, clean water); increased resilience to shocks and coping capacity; improvement in social status; increased voice and advocacy; and women’s empowerment.

The 2015 EEP/Shiree graduation survey found a graduation rate of 95.8% across partner projects,⁴ with the majority of those left behind sharing common features of vulnerability: female-headed, elderly and/or disabled households.

1.2 Process and Limitations
This report uses the data from the evaluation reports of SF projects, supplemented by discussions with SF PNGOs and EEP staff, to document lessons learnt on a thematic basis, and provide some deeper commentary on the approaches by SF partners used to help BHHs graduate from extreme poverty. It seeks to provide concise thematic information for policy makers and practitioners who are dealing with extreme poverty programme design and

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³ See Annex IV for summary table of EEP/Shiree graduation criteria.
⁴N. Mascie-Taylor. and R. Goto, Evidence for sustainability of graduation of extreme poor Bangladeshi households two or more years post Income Generating Activities support, 23 October 2015.
implementation, as well as recommendations that could be considered in future programming, focusing on the following overarching questions:\(^5\)

- How relevant and appropriate were the approaches and the designs of the projects towards tackling extreme poverty?
- What are the key common lessons learnt from the experiences of these 14 SF projects towards the design and delivery of future extreme poverty projects, and how can they be addressed?

Given limitations of time and available information,\(^6\) this report is intended as a ‘light touch’ review rather than a detailed meta-evaluation. More emphasis is placed on overarching lessons to be drawn around common themes – what worked well, what worked not so well, and why – rather than any comparative analysis of the metrics of success on each SF project. It draws upon common themes to be found across the diverse set of intervention models, compiling recommendations on best practice to inform future extreme poor programming. However, given the highly varied nature of extreme poor households, practitioner experiences will continue to be different; what works in one set of circumstances may not be applicable in another. To that extent, lessons in this report are intended to stimulate thinking, rather than being interpreted as definitive, incontrovertible recommendations.

The main source of data analysed were the individual SF evaluation reports, which were contracted by the NGOs themselves from their own project budgets, according to a guideline Terms of Reference (ToR) template set out by EEP, which was adapted by each NGO. Whilst the ToR template sought a degree of consistency in reports, due to financial and other limitations these reports varied greatly in terms both of their level of detail and quality of analysis. Although many reports adhered to DAC criteria, reporting on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of interventions, others were much less comprehensive, focusing on quantitative progress against the project log frame in lieu of an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the intervention model. Sample sizes for surveys of beneficiaries varied between evaluations, and the extent of qualitative data-gathering through focus group discussions and key informant interviews also varied.

While the majority of evaluations were independently contracted out through a competitive procurement process, one of the 14 SF PNGOs evaluated their own project.\(^7\) Evaluation budgets varied between PNGOs, as did the structure of evaluation teams: some used a single consultant, others a team of individual consultants, and several contracted local consulting firms. Only one PNGO included an international consultant on their evaluation team.\(^8\) Another expressed a concern that they were unable to generate sufficient interest even from national evaluators due to budget limitations.\(^9\) In future, PNGOs should ensure their project designs include sufficient funds for detailed ex post evaluation, or the Challenge Fund (CF) manager should hold the total evaluation budget and centrally manage this process across the portfolio of supported projects. In the case of PONGO-led evaluations, the CF manager should provide partners with a standardised reporting structure and format, to guide evaluators and ensure the consistency of information captured, and play a quality assurance role in terms of due diligence on consultants hired.

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\(^5\) For more detail on the objectives of this report, refer to the Terms of Reference at Annex I.

\(^6\) These findings are based on a consultancy of 24.5 days in duration, involving two drips to Dhaka. The primary data used was SF evaluation reports and a limited set of stakeholder consultations (PNGO and EEP staff).

\(^7\) HKI, whose evaluation report was still incomplete at the time of drafting this report.

\(^8\) PAB, whose evaluation included a high level of analysis.

\(^9\) CARE, who did not include an evaluation budget in their project design. Despite having a relatively high budget of BDT 12 lakh for their evaluation, CARE only received interest from only one consultant at this price.
PNGOs were given the opportunity to respond to and clarify evaluation findings via individual meetings, held either in person or via Skype. Most expressed satisfaction with the evaluation process, overarching findings and recommendations. Some PNGOs suggested that they found some of the recommendations to be shallow, and that they would have liked to have seen a higher level of analysis to tell the story behind why interventions had the impact that they did, or why certain results were not achieved. Many PNGOs wished to qualify some of the more critical evaluation findings, and some were still engaged in an iterative process of comment and redrafting. PNGO comments, and evaluators’ responses to these comments, were not documented in any of the final evaluation reports, indicating poor version control and a lack of transparency as to what feedback from PNGOs had or had not been included in final evaluation reports.

Views were also sought from EEP Programme Managers in a joint session focusing on thematic areas of lessons, and in individual follow-up sessions on specific issues where required. A lesson learning workshop held in late March 2016 to encourage critical self-reflection amongst PNGOs around the thematic areas in this report, to validate findings and to fill any gaps. The information reported back in the (English-speaking) plenary session of the workshop was far less detailed in comparison to the extensive (Bengali language) discussions held during group work sessions, so the scope of what is captured here is necessarily limited.

1.3 Structure of the Report
This report is structured in three sections, as follows:

- **Relevance and Appropriateness of Projects**: EEP/Shiree has been extremely successful in graduating households out of extreme poverty, demonstrating that the models adopted under the SF were both relevant and appropriate. This section therefore looks to identify common features of project success, or areas to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of projects, based on common threads emerging across end of project evaluations.

- **Suitability of Challenge Fund Model**: This brief section provides some insight (to the extent possible within the Terms of Reference) as to what extent the CF was an appropriate mechanism for sustainably lifting large numbers of households out of extreme poverty. SF evaluations naturally focus on project results rather than the mechanism by which projects were selected for funding, so this section is based on discussions with SF partners and documentation available on the calls for proposals. For this reason the insights under this section are inconclusive as to the CF’s suitability, instead rather ‘food for thought’ for future programming.

- **Thematic Lessons**: The bulk of this analysis lies in seven standalone sections, drawing on lessons from all Scale Fund partners. These sections will have the ability to be independently published either in the current form or as smaller publications to inform the practitioner community, and will focus on the following key thematic areas:
  - IGA selection
  - Training
  - Asset transfer
  - Linkage with Government
  - Women’s Empowerment

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10 A full list of consultations can be found at Annex II.
11 In general, quantitative information from beneficiary surveys was subject to a higher level of analysis than qualitative information from FGDs and KIIs.
12 As just one of many examples, one PNGO requested that the evaluation team upwardly revise BHH monthly income end line figures, from BDT6,000 in the initial draft to approximately BDT10,000 in the final report (the difference could be justified, based on differences in sampling).
13 Summaries of the Bengali discussions were sought from EEP Research Associates who circled between the small groups as they debated the thematic lessons.
• Access to Land
• Cross-NGO Learning

This report documents some of the key lessons learned, which is an ongoing process as EEP draws to a close. SF PNGOs have now entered an eight month No Cost Extension (NCE) period, running from January through August 2016, in which several core activities are still ongoing. For this reason, this report intentionally excludes some important SF project features that are expected to produce further learning over the coming months. The topics that have been excluded from the current report include:

• **Savings.** Encouraging BHHs to save was an important success factor for ensuring the sustainability of interventions. SF projects incorporated a variety of savings mechanisms: individual bank accounts; group bank accounts; VSLAs; cooperatives; lottery/revolving fund. Lessons emerging from the SF evaluations focus on the lack of institutional integrity and sustainability of group savings mechanisms, both in terms of capacity and governance structures. Given that savings groups are one of the ongoing features during the current no cost extension period, it is recommended that EEP/Shiree examine the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches to savings at a later date.

• **Nutrition.** SF partners were tasked with rolling out a Direct Nutrition Initiative (DNI) in September 2013, to complement economic interventions by addressing the nutritional needs of target groups at critical points across the life cycle. The DNI was a standardised set of interventions across SF partners, combining micronutrient interventions (iron and folate supplements to women and girls, micro-nutrient sprinkles to under 2 year old children, and deworming medication to some household members). This was coupled with individual counselling and behaviour change communication on breastfeeding and complementary feeding, food hygiene, hand-washing, sanitary practices, family planning, dietary improvements, and gender-related issues. Given the standardised nature of the DNI, it is not expected that the lesson learning will vary greatly between PNGOs according to individual project designs and intervention models. A standalone study should be undertaken to examine lessons learned on the relevance, appropriateness and impact of the DNI.

• **Market Development.** Market development did not feature in the original concept for the SF, and PNGOs were not explicitly encouraged to focus on market linkages when submitting concept notes for funding consideration. Several SF evaluations picked up on this omission, recommending that market linkages and value chain development feature more prominently in future project designs. While there was some evidence of good practice, particularly from those PNGOs with a track record in market development, the major lesson emerging from evaluations was that SF project designs did not sufficiently address markets. Project evaluations and consultations with PNGOs to some extent reveal a perception that provision of additional support linking IGAs to markets becomes more relevant after BHHs graduate into the ‘moderate poor’ category, and is less relevant when working with the extreme poor. This report considers markets insofar as these informed IGA selection, but there is insufficient evidence from SF projects to provide comprehensive lessons on developing markets that function to support the needs of the extreme poor.

EEP will separately produce short standalone documents on lessons learned around savings, nutrition and any other relevant themes over the coming months.

14 Initial lessons emerging across SF evaluations include: human resource issues (inexperience of the Community Pusti Kormi (CPK) volunteers giving counsel to BHHs; high turnover of CPK volunteers); the need to consider cultural factors (traditional beliefs in certain communities were found to hinder behaviour change objectives); and project duration (the need for a longer programming cycle to see impact of behaviour change interventions).

15 This was in progress at the time of writing this report, per a separate recommendation from the latest EEP Annual Review.

16 HSI, Green Hill, PAB, HKI, and Shushilan, see Section 4.1 for details.
2 Relevance and Appropriateness of Projects

The SF was extremely successful in graduating households out of extreme poverty. SF projects deployed a wide array of interventions – asset transfer, cash transfer, technology transfer, market linkages, enterprise development, community group / VSLA development, transferring khas land, and improving rights, voice and accountability – to tackle common issues faced by the extreme poor. By applying a combination of interventions which individually have proved relevant and appropriate to combating extreme poverty, SF projects successfully addressed the multiple drivers of extreme poverty to ensure sustainable graduation.17

Round One of the SF, implemented over two phases, consisted of six NGOs working in rural (CARE, NETZ, PAB, SCI and UTTARAN) and urban (DSK) areas. Round Two consisted of three NGOs (CARITAS, Concern Worldwide, and Oxfam) working in challenging areas – the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), haor and the southern coastal region. Round Three (“Scale Up”) consisted of 5 NGOs (HSI, HKI, Green Hill, Shushilan and MJSKS) who had received funding for pilots under the IF that were then taken to scale. Round Four (“Scale Out”) sought to add approximately 48,000 new HHs to existing SF projects. These four phases are summarised in Table 1 under Section 1.1 of this report.

The heterogeneity of models and geo-topographical/cultural contexts covered by SF projects provides a broad evidence base from which to draw lessons, but also renders it difficult to make any comparative analysis of their relevance or appropriateness, given the key drivers and challenges of EP can be very different in each area. This section therefore lists some general lessons around the structure and approach to extreme poverty programming emerging from SF evaluations. Specific technical features of project designs are dealt with under latter sections of this report, where thematic lessons are analysed.

Project duration and phase-wise recruitment matters. SF projects with multiple phases were found to sustain and magnify improvements during the second phase. In some cases, the time to graduate decreased during the second project phase, as approaches were refined and perfected and intervention packages integrated. Certain IGAs require longer timescales to reap benefits, either minimising the economic impact that can be observed over shorter project cycles, or precluding them from selection for asset transfer. Some interventions – for example behaviour change around nutrition, and institutional development of savings groups – by their nature also require a longer time horizon to have an impact. Furthermore, projects that used multiple phases were able to provide support in later phases to earlier phase households (albeit at a reduced level) in order to ensure the gains made were not reversed. These findings are supported by the CMS 3 data, which shows some BHHs graduated for the first time after the two year project cycle ended. This suggests that cohorts should be given sufficient time to graduate; for benefits to be compounded, a light touch support structure after the bulk of interventions have concluded is important.

Graduation is not an end state. Some SF evaluations critiqued the focus on graduation as “blind-siding” intervention models to a more holistic and sustainable approach to development, factoring in issues like education, employment, market linkages, finance, and government or other service provision. Future programming should consider how to follow, monitor and support households who have recently stepped over the graduation threshold, both in terms of facilitating access to markets, employment, services and technology, as well as mitigating against shocks that have the potential to reverse any gains made. It may be more appropriate to address the needs of recent graduates through facilitating linkages to other projects or service providers, to avoid ‘mission creep’ – i.e. diluting the focus of EP programmes on the bottom 10%.

17 As evidenced by 94.7% of people graduating in all six surveys. N. Mascie-Taylor. and R. Goto, Evidence for sustainability of graduation of extreme poor Bangladeshi households two or more years post Income Generating Activities support, 23 October 2015.
Balancing multi-dimensional with systemic interventions. A key strength of many SF projects was their combination of different interventions to address the multidimensional nature of extreme poverty. Certain SF projects were more strategic about applying multidimensional and holistic approaches to working with the extreme poor, in terms of multiple overlapping interventions targeting systemic change across a number of (economic, social, political) spheres. However, synergies between interventions were not always fully developed, and some project designs constituted a combination of different approaches rather than a clear model with a well-developed Theory of Change.

EEP was not initially conceived as a graduation programme; the introduction of this concept did have an effect to ensure a more consistent focus by PNGOs on key indicators included as part of the EEP/Shiree Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (ESMPI). This naturally led to changes in intervention design, and did help to identify some key common success factors (such as control of land (whether farmland or security of household tenure), food security) that are highly important in graduating from extreme poverty. Future CF programmes should consider making the required elements of EP projects more explicit at proposal stage – for example, requiring project proposals to include a coherent, integrated approach to improving household nutrition, ensuring access to land, women’s empowerment, policy/advocacy, or market linkages – to improve the theoretical coherence of bottom-up, propositional models. This would be of value in providing a strong “springboard” base from which pathways out of poverty could radiate, and increase the chances of success.

Ongoing learning and adaptation of approaches. There is significant evidence of PNGO approaches being altered from proposal to implementation stage, as interventions produce learning that is applied to programme management. From refined beneficiary targeting,\(^{18}\) to adjusting asset procurement processes,\(^{19}\) discouraging the uptake of high-risk or high-failure IGAs,\(^{20}\) to abandonment of over-complex technologies,\(^{21}\) SF evaluations reveal countless incidents of applied learning throughout the implementation of projects. This raises the question as to what extent some of this learning could and should have been applied at project design stage, particularly for latter SF Rounds when learning was readily available from existing SF projects or from IF projects being taken to scale.\(^{22}\) It also suggests that the Challenge Fund’s ‘bottom-up’ approach may require exhaustive needs assessment during project design, to ensure robust approaches from the outset.

3 Suitability of Challenge Fund Approach

Although outside the scope of the ToR for this assignment, DFID requested a synthesis of any available information on what extent the CF approach was a suitable and effective mechanism for lifting large numbers of households out of extreme poverty. Individual SF evaluations did not provide much insight here, given the natural focus on results during the period of project funding, rather than the process by which projects were initially appraised and funded. The following insights were gleaned from discussions held with SF PNGOs and EEP staff, and although fairly piecemeal, provide some food for thought to consider when designing the delivery mechanism for future extreme poverty programmes:

Breadth of Evidence Base. Where other extreme poverty projects in Bangladesh deploy a standardised set of interventions, EEP is unique for the variety of intervention models across a range of geographic, cultural and socio-economic contexts. EEP projects addressed rural and urban areas; \(\text{monga, waterlogged, drought-prone, cyclone-ravaged and remote riverine}\)

\(^{18}\) Some projects switched to exclusively targeting female beneficiaries, or stopped targeting disabled beneficiaries.

\(^{19}\) See 4.3 for detailed learning around asset procurement.

\(^{20}\) See 4.1 for examples, including restricting crop varieties during Phase II of projects, or placing limits on the % of HHs able to select livestock rearing as their IGA.

\(^{21}\) The burdensome CMS2 was discontinued, as were complex technologies such as the oestrous synchronisation of hormones in cattle.

\(^{22}\) This is explored further in section 5.6 on Cross-NGO Learning.
geographies; cultural and linguistically diverse ethnic minorities and Adivasi groups; khasland processing and slum evictions. Some projects were running for several years before the DNI was introduced, and for others nutrition activities were integrated with livelihoods activities from the beginning. Support packages offered to HHs, and hence cost-per-beneficiary, varied depending on project designs and individual HH micro plans. In this sense, the CF model provides an extremely broad and rich evidence base from which to increase understanding of approaches to addressing extreme poverty, and to influence policies and practices around the needs of the extreme poor. It also enabled interventions to be developed and approaches refined on a contextual basis, according to the geographic and demographic needs of different areas in Bangladesh. Top-down, predetermined approaches may be less suitable at scale than this bottom-up approach, given the need to consider context-specific drivers of extreme poverty, and a tailored approach to tackle this.

**Flexibility in NGO Partnership Models.** Several SF projects were implemented using an iNGO-pNGO delivery model, by which a ‘lead’ (generally international) NGO provides strategic direction and implementation support to sub-partner (local) NGOs providing direct delivery to BHHS. There is a valid question as to what extent this multi-layered partnership model provides the best value for money for donor funds. Lead NGOs undoubtedly add value in terms of building the capacity of local partners, and providing project monitoring and support at the regional level. It would be untenable to expect EEP Programme Managers to provide this same level of oversight and support to local NGOs, without increasing EEP staffing at central and possibly also regional levels. Several SF projects were however implemented using single-layered structures – direct delivery through iNGOs without sub-partnerships, and direct funding of Bangladeshi NGOs without a lead international partner—and both of these models demonstrated success. Rigorous cost benefit analysis is required to determine whether future mechanisms to fund PNGO projects should be restricted only to direct delivery, with a more substantial role for the CF manager in monitoring and providing TA to implementing organisations. This would need to examine to what extent transactional costs from the eliminated management layer would be pushed upwards or downwards onto another layer in the delivery structure.

**Attribution of Results.** SF projects often represent one element of broader NGO programming in a particular geographic region or thematic area, making it difficult to disentangle those components that are unique to EEP, and to attribute results to DFID/SDC funding. Discussions with PNGOs revealed that EEP funds are, in some cases, used to continue, scale up or deepen existing interventions, or as a springboard on which additional interventions are built using funding from other sources. The asset transfer and training/facilitation components of SF projects can generally be delineated as a dedicated, EEP-supported initiative, with obvious entry/exit points and a ring-fenced budget. However many of the supporting or enabling interventions that tackle the multidimensional nature of extreme poverty, including group development, advocacy, market linkages, and basic service provision, can be harder to directly attribute to EEP funding. While offering less capacity for

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23 DSK outlined how the EEP team supported them to develop their Project Concept Note into a Full Proposal, ensuring that good ideas put forward by local NGOs were able to compete for funding despite curtailed capacity on formal applications for large scale donor funding.

24 Some examples include: CARE’s SETU programme spring-boarded off institutional linkages, private sector partnerships, TVET, and governance-strengthening initiatives supported under projects funded by other donors (e.g. garment sector training provided thanks to partnership with Far East Knitting & Dyeing Industries, IDLC Finance, the EU-funded ILO TVET Reform Project). Concern Worldwide’s advocacy activities are conducted at the micro, meso, and macro level across programmes, not at the project level, such that EEP-related work around CBO strengthening (including the parliamentary group for haor livelihoods, technical support to CBOs, and strengthening of CBO federations) is supported by BDT 6m of funds sourced from outside of the EEP funding envelope. DSK’s health, water and sanitation support to BHHS was provided through linkages to existing projects DSK delivers in Dhaka slums, rather than directly attributable to EEP funding. The HSI project linked with other of their projects in the area, particularly supporting activities through reinforcing BHH access to services (both government and private sector).
contextual adaptation and flexibility to leverage additional resources, a top-down, predetermined delivery model implemented by service providers whose activities and budgets are closely monitored by a managing agent may afford greater transparency in terms of attributing activities to ring-fenced budgets.

4. Thematic Lessons

4.1 IGA Selection

A common lesson emerging across SF projects is the need to adopt a more systematic approach to IGA selection, based on rigorous market analysis, grounded in the geotopographic and climactic characteristics of an area, and according to individual beneficiary strengths. Some PNGOs applied learning over the course of their projects to refine the IGA list based on what worked, suggesting that a more systematic and analytical approach to IGA selection from the outset could have improved project effectiveness. Evaluations highlighted the following strengths and weaknesses of IGA selection in SF projects:

**Household specific IGA planning:** Many SF projects developed tailored, individual development micro-plans at the HH level, providing a 'strengths-based' approach to asset selection and support that also takes into account differing levels of vulnerability and known risk of failure to graduate. This individualised HH development plan approach was widely praised for its flexibility and potential to provide a range of different pathways out of poverty, tailored to individual needs, skills and geographic/market factors. In some cases this even included interventions targeted at different members of a single BHH, providing different assets or inputs for the husband and wife, and skills training for adolescent boys and girls.

**Inter-household equity in asset packages:** Several SF projects reported conflict arising from variations to the asset package as a result of individually tailored HH development plans. For example, a HH choosing cage based fisheries would receive BDT4,000 for their IGA, whereas a HH choosing heifer rearing would receive BDT15,000. A more equitable approach would be to offer a standardised cash value for assets, which could be used towards a diverse portfolio of assets. This has the added benefit of ensuring comparability across HHs and projects so, for example, different initial transfer values are eliminated as a potential contributing factor to different income-generation or graduation outcomes.

**Mismatch between beneficiary capacity/capability and IGAs:** Notwithstanding the widespread success of the HH microplanning approach, there was some evidence of mismatch between beneficiary skill sets and the IGAs transferred to them. Women in particular were found to lack confidence to branch out to non-agricultural or non-livestock pursuits, despite there being potential for off-farm IGAs close to the homestead such as grocery shops, tailoring clothes businesses, cosmetic businesses. There was also evidence of livestock IGAs – an overwhelmingly popular choice – failing because BHHs had insufficient livestock-rearing experience, or lacked supplementary income to manage livestock support costs. The labour-intensiveness of certain IGAs also rendered them unsuitable for female-headed, disabled and elderly BHHs. In such cases, PNGO front line staff could give BHHs a stronger steer towards

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25 This is the model used by the Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP), another of DFID’s extreme poverty programmes in Bangladesh, which contracts its NGO implementing partners under service agreements rather than grant agreements, ensuring that a standardised operational design is delivered by all partners.

26 For example, CARITAS Phase I project included many varieties of fruit trees but Phase II only provided the variety that works very well. They also initially only included long term garden & fruit trees, but later on added short-term assets as well, for consumption smoothing based on seasonal income flows.

27 Good examples of this ‘whole household’ approach can be found in Save the Children’s Household Economic and Food Security (HEFS) project, and in CARE’s Social and Economic Transformation of the Ultra-Poor (SETU) project.
high potential IGAs which they may not have considered, or away from IGAs which may seem attractive but for which there is insufficient HH capacity to develop an enterprise.

**Diversified approach to IGA selection:** Interventions appeared to be more successful when beneficiaries were transferred more than one asset type, giving them an already-diversified portfolio to manage risk; a primary IGA that will generate high returns over the long term, and a secondary IGA that provides quicker and safer returns. This two-tier approach encourages BHHs to expand a business whilst addressing seasonal variations in productivity and preventing asset sale during the lean period or as a result of economic, climactic or health shocks. The challenge for implementing partners is then to ensure that the similar levels of asset support (fodder, fencing, etc), training and business development coaching are devoted to secondary IGAs, within limited project budgets. Some BHHs who did not receive a diversified asset base from the outset sold their assets (particularly large livestock) too early to meet immediate cash and food security needs, resulting in low profitability. Others traded off between daily expenditures such as feeding their family, and the costs of asset maintenance such as fodder. There were some examples of successful asset diversification from a single IGA approach, but in general BHHs were more successful and under less financial strain in projects where more than one type of IGA was initially transferred.

**Market analysis to understand IGA potential:** The market potential of IGAs must be analysed prior to asset selection, to ensure IGAs have potential to accumulate, diversify and succeed as a business, rather than simply be held as a safety net or store of wealth. This is particularly important in hard-to-reach and disaster-prone areas, where access to markets is restricted, and collective bulking of products is limited by the geographic dispersal of HHs. Some PNGOs implemented post-hoc interventions to improve marketing of IGA products, but there was little evidence of SF projects undertaking detailed market analysis of IGA options prior to their endorsement as a viable option for BHHs. This led in some cases to high potential (particularly off-farm) IGAs being overlooked, to large variations in asset price during both procurement and resale, or to IGA failure.

**Improving marketability of IGA products:** Amongst PNGOs with expertise in market development, there was some evidence of good practice around the marketing of products generated by IGAs. Some project designs included elements such as: BHH training on market linkages (pricing, market information, packaging, grading and market actors); facilitating connections between producers and input suppliers; group purchasing of agricultural inputs; and establishment of collection points as exchange centres between buyers and sellers in remote areas.

**Need for good data on IGA viability and effectiveness:** Most projects collected data on IGA uptake (% of BHHs selecting different types of assets), but there was very little comparative analysis undertaken on the effectiveness of different IGAs in different geo-topographical areas, and for different BHH profiles. This is a gap in the evidence base emerging from the SF, and a missed opportunity to inform future programming.

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28The MJSKS evaluation found budget allocated to support secondary assets was lacking, despite this being part of their strategy to mitigate against risk. BHHs were given extensive support caring for cattle, but no support for the costs or technical requirements of caring for secondary assets such as poultry. NETZ initially was providing their Adivasi beneficiaries with secondary assets (supplementary to cattle) to meet immediate needs, but they found that this strategy failed because of a lack of BHH capacity to manage 3 to 4 types of IGA.

29 For example, a small proportion of MJSKS BHHs (8%) used their increased income to diversify and invest in other IGAs, for example taking mortgaged or leased land for cultivation, or developing small businesses.

30 For example, projects in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) were found to emphasise agricultural pursuits and cash crop cultivation at the expense of off-farm IGAs, despite the tourism industry offering significant potential for handicraft or souvenir businesses.

31 Some examples given of IGA failure in urban areas included rice selling (due to price fluctuations), sewing businesses (difficulty competing with garment industry on price and quantity); tea stall (require further borrowing on project input to meet cash requirement for expansion)

32 Good examples can be found in projects by HSI, Green Hill, PAB, HKI, and Shushilan.
Importance of cost-effective and user-friendly technology: There are many good examples of PNGOs using technology to augment the income-generating benefits of assets transferred. Sometimes technologies were deployed to mitigate potential loss of assets in disaster-prone or waterlogged areas, and others used technology to increase the marketability of assets. There were however instances where technology failed because it was not user or context-appropriate, generally due to over-complexity. Several evaluations found this to be the case of the mobile phone based CMS2 (facilitating regular, real time data collection from all BHHs), which was found to be overly burdensome for frontline staff. Similarly, the MJSKS project’s oestrous synchronisation technology failed because it required certain preconditions around the weight and health condition of cattle that were difficult for extreme poor beneficiaries to meet. There were also instances where technology could have significantly improved IGA productivity – for instance, low-cost irrigation systems for cash cropping – but was not implemented in any of the EEP projects.

Considering climate and disaster risk: Given the range of climactic shocks and disasters to which Bangladesh is susceptible – droughts, floods, cyclones, and earthquakes – it is critical to consider climate and disaster vulnerability and resilience in selecting IGAs for extreme poor families. Many PNGOs operating in difficult contexts factored this in to their project designs. For example, in the difficult haor areas of Sunamganj district in north-east Bangladesh, HSI successfully identified and promoted IGAs and production technologies that were mostly unsusceptible to flood risk: short duration boro rice; multi-layered vegetable cultivation; and early/quick fruit tree plantation.

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33 For example: HSI’s sac method for homestead vegetable cultivation in waterlogged haor areas, in which seedlings are prepared in decomposed water hyacinth balls, to mitigate against soil being washed away; Uttaran’s cheap and simple Hormone Pheromone Trap as a successful biological control method for crops.

34 Green Hill’s turmeric crushing technology allowed BHHs to increase the time between harvesting and sale, and enabled sufficient bulking (1-2kg) of turmeric to facilitate linkages with buyers; PAB supported pumpkin growers with storage facilities allowing them to sell some produce during the off-season later in the year, for a higher price.

35 To regulate the reproductive cycle of cattle
Training

Good training is a cornerstone of the ‘graduation model’. Intensive support offered through regular facilitation of BHHs is seen to be equally important as the material support provided through cash or asset transfers. A number of SF evaluations were critical of the quality of IGA training, in terms of content, relevance, process and frequency, and recommended that training modules should be diversified and intensified. Some of the key lessons and best practices include:

**Skills training prior to asset transfer:** Whilst business and technical skills related to IGA development must be developed on an ongoing basis over the project lifecycle, evidence from the SF suggests that there should be an initial period of intensive skills transfer prior to BHHs receiving their chosen IGAs. PNGOs stressed that asset transfer should occur as soon as possible after the initial period of training, so that information is retained and applied to the initial stages of IGA development to ensure maximum effectiveness.

**Importance of practical trainings for extreme poor beneficiaries:** Once-off, one day training events covering complex processes like livestock rearing or business planning and marketing were seen to be less successful than ‘on-the-job’, IGA-based practical trainings in which beneficiaries were actively involved. This could include farmer field schools and demonstration plots for groups of beneficiaries involved in agricultural IGAs, or supervising individual beneficiaries in practical trainings prior to asset transfer, for example providing beneficiaries with on-the-job experience in a functioning tea stall prior to transferring them their own tea business. Beneficiary training was more effective when delivered on an ongoing basis,

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**Recommendations – IGA Selection:**

- **Household level micro plans are a powerful tool for ensuring that IGAs are matched to the particular needs and capacity of BHHs.** Household level micro plans should consider beneficiary preferences but front line staff should guide the process to ensure a good match and that BHH potential is adequately captured.

- **Standardisation of cash/asset package values reduces potential conflict, and encourages uptake of high potential assets with lower initial values.** Residual funds from a standardised transfer package can be used for asset support costs or additional inputs.

- **Providing BHHs with more than one IGA helps to smooth consumption and mitigate against shocks:** a primary IGA that will generate high returns over the long run, and at least one secondary IGA that provides quicker and safer returns. Providing a mixed asset base at the outset is all the more important in fragile and disaster-prone areas.

- **Combining on- and off-farm IGAs can minimise risk,** diversifying patterns of seasonal income flow, supporting value chain development through service provision, small-scale manufacturing, food processing, trading, etc, and allowing for alternative economic opportunities for different household members, including vocational training or apprenticeships for young people.

- **Detailed market analysis should be undertaken prior to proposing IGAs for specific locations.** This should include cost-benefit analysis of IGAs, also factoring in opportunity costs; labour intensiveness, rate of income growth, etc. It should also consider climate vulnerability and disaster risk reduction.

- **Asset/cash transfers and training should be supplemented with appropriate technological support,** which is user- and context-appropriate in terms of both cost and complexity.

- **Future programmes should collect and analyse data on the effectiveness of different types of IGAs,** to produce a robust evidence base for what works in different geographical areas and for different beneficiary profiles.
aligned with different stages in the IGA cycle to troubleshoot common issues at critical junctures. 36

**Sufficient budget and human resources for intensive and ongoing training:** While EEP was successful in ensuring a high percentage of donor funding was channelled directly to beneficiaries, 37 the proportion of this direct delivery allocated to training and facilitation was oftentimes insufficient. Budgets set aside for purchasing assets or inputs absorbed a large percentage of funds for beneficiaries and, whilst PNGOs acknowledged that amounts dedicated to training should have been higher, budget limitations tend to preference ‘hard’ (asset and cash transfer) over ‘soft’ (technical and business skills transfer) outcomes, in order to meet direct delivery targets imposed by government or donors. Training quality was also affected by high staff-to-beneficiary ratios, which placed a heavy burden on front line staff who are tasked with troubleshooting technical and business-related issues on a wide variety of on- and off-farm IGAs for high numbers of BHHs. 38 Providing tailored, ongoing and intensive training and facilitation for extreme poor beneficiaries requires significant human capital investment which, if strengthened in future programming, may increase the cost-to-serve per BHH.

**Strengthening business knowledge amongst staff and beneficiaries:** Technical training on asset care and cultivation was generally better-developed than support to BHHs on business practices such as bookkeeping, markets, procurement etc. Some PNGOs focused substantially 39 or exclusively 40 on business skills training, but by and large technical curricula were much better developed than business management curricula. Internal and externally-engaged technical experts in key IGA categories – livestock, fisheries, agriculture, etc – were recruited to advise on technical trainings and support ongoing skills transfer, but additional expertise on business planning and financial management was not often prioritised. Business development knowledge amongst many front line staff was also found to be inadequate.

**Overcoming language and literacy barriers:** Many SF evaluations recommended that trainings be tailored towards low-literacy populations to ensure maximum success, and indeed many SF partners demonstrated good practice in this regard. This included simplifying key messages, conveying information through the use of visual aids and pictograms, “learning by storytelling”, ensuring training is correctly targeted, 41 and using practical over classroom-based trainings where possible. Those PNGOs working with ethnic minority groups in the CHT noted the importance of ensuring that training materials and trainers use local dialects to convey key messages, and found that language barriers oftentimes hampered the results of trainings.

**Partnerships with public and private service providers for sustainability:** Training was more effective when it engaged LSPs and government extension (DAE and DLS) officers to encourage ownership and sustainability. 42 Involving government departments and LSPs in training on an ongoing basis effectively creates a local cadre of trainers who can provide ongoing support to beneficiaries after donor-funded programmes cease. There were also

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36 HSI held individual training demonstrations for cash crops at key points in the process - planting, mulching, pollination, harvest etc.

37 Different figures are cited by EEP/PNGO staff, but it appears that EEP can claim approximately 60% direct delivery to beneficiaries overall.

38 Many evaluations cited inappropriately high staff-to-beneficiary ratios – sometimes as high as 1:300 – as a major weakness. The staff-to-beneficiary ratio of one PNGO meant that one staff member would have to visit 10 HHs every day of the year to get through their workload, making it very difficult to maintain quality supervision.

39 DSK beneficiaries received Entrepreneurship Development and Business Management (EDBM) training over several sessions, during the first of which they developed individual business plans. Following the first EDBM training, BHHs received ongoing refresher trainings.

40 SCI did not provide any technical IGA training to BHHs, instead only focusing on business skills.

41 For example, one evaluation found that livestock training for female-headed HHs did not include their spouses, even though they are often involved in caring for animals.

42 For example, HSI developed floating garden videos for DAE staff, LSPs and beneficiaries, and involved DAE/DLS and LSPs in field-based training / demonstration plots.
isolated examples of good practice involving public private partnerships to deliver sustainable training, for example in CARE’s partnership with garment manufacturer Far East Knitting & Dyeing Industries, which provided 3 month intensive skills training to beneficiaries.

**Recommendations – Training:**

- **Training effectiveness is maximised when delivered immediately prior to asset transfer**, with ongoing, practical refresher trainings to consolidate messages and troubleshoot issues with IGA development.
- **On-the-job training and practical demonstrations are more effective than formal, classroom-style training.** Particularly when aligned with key stages or processes in the IGA cycle.
- **Sufficient training budgets and staff-to-beneficiary ratios are required to enable intensive, regular training and facilitation of households,** given the centrality of human capital value to working with the extreme poor.
- **Business development skills are equally important as technical knowledge on IGAs.** Training should cover the technical requirements of livestock, agricultural and other enterprises, as well as business planning, marketing, financial management and other business skills. Frontline staff should have access to relevant business development as well as technical expertise to support quality training and facilitation.
- **Training materials should take into account literacy and language barriers.** Simple, pictographic messages are effective in trainings for extreme poor beneficiaries, and local dialects should be used for training ethnic minority communities.
- **Strategic partnerships can facilitate the sustainability of skills transfer.** This includes involving government in technical IGA trainings, developing LSPs as training providers, and linking with private sector organisations for skills training.

### 4.3 Asset Transfer

Asset transfer is a core component of all SF projects. Whether beneficiaries were given cash to purchase their own inputs according to pre-approved business plans, or PNGO staff procured these on their behalf, the transfer of a productive asset is a cornerstone of the graduation model. The asset procurement and transfer process proved difficult for many PNGOs, and most projects experienced difficulties that provide the opportunity for lesson learning. SF evaluations highlighted the following key lessons around asset transfer:

**Livestock mortality risk from non-local procurement:** A common lesson emerging from SF evaluations is the need to consider the geographical source of IGA inputs, particularly in the case of livestock. Most SF projects with a livestock component faced significant issues with animal mortality soon after procurement, and some moved away from livestock as an asset after large numbers of animals imported from other areas died.43

**Beneficiary-led purchasing:** Some PNGOs adjusted the livestock procurement process to ensure animals were sourced locally, by purchasing assets directly through beneficiary groups. This served the dual benefit of reducing procurement-related costs,44 and reducing the risk of mortality by locally sourcing animals. Beneficiaries were engaged throughout the process, from negotiating the price, to preparing a requisition/procurement plan, and providing reconciliation vouchers from the vendor.45 As with livestock procurement, models where

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43 For example, Oxfam transferred BHHs inappropriate poultry breeds for the southern coastal geo-topographical areas, sourced from different districts. They stopped offering poultry as an IGA option after widespread mortality.

44 The lack of a formal tender process eliminated cost of advertising, vendor costs, VAT.

45 PNGOs using beneficiary-led procurement noted the need to balance documentary requirements for the audit trail and the capacity of extreme poor beneficiaries, as obligatory voucher systems were found to be overly burdensome.
beneficiaries were responsible for directly procuring agricultural inputs – for example Green Hill’s CCT model – reduced susceptibility to traps in the procurement process.

**Needs-based selection of suppliers:** For agricultural inputs, many PNGOs found it cheaper and easier to procure through government channels. The Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) was in many cases able to provide large volumes of quality inputs at a fair price, where other suppliers lacked this capacity. Private sector partnerships were found to be useful in sourcing specialised agricultural inputs, for example seeds that were modified to suit the soil and climatic conditions of project areas. Local shopping from neighbours or local markets was most appropriate for livestock purchasing, reducing the risk of mortality that came with importing livestock from neighbouring districts.

**Robust procurement planning:** Poor procurement planning and insufficient timescales allocated for asset transfer were found to compromise quality, resulting in the procurement of low quality inputs. Work plan slippages (operational delays) or inappropriate planning (unrealistic timescales) also resulted in asset procurement falling out of sync with the optimal point in the season. For example, the asset procurement process for the MJSKS dairy and beef project took much longer than expected, meaning that 50% of BHHs did not receive milk during the lean *monga* period, which was a key feature of the project design.

**Market distortions and price fluctuations:** In some instances, poor forward planning led to procurement failures as a result of market distortions. Evaluation of the NETZ cattle transfer project noted that the lack of prior market analysis of the cattle supply, or a robust procurement plan for purchasing large quantities of assets, drove prices up. The result was that that BHHs were unable to purchase good quality assets at the originally intended price, and some had to change their choice of asset due to market distortions.

**Staggering the procurement process:** Best practice was demonstrated by PNGOs who adopted a staggered approach to procurement, based on thorough advance planning. HSI followed a split distribution system of providing assets at different times, based on HH needs and individual plans. The staggered approach also allows for learning to be applied and subsequent procurement rounds to be adjusted, for example in the case of CARITAS who originally planned to deliver agricultural inputs twice in their project (30kg ginger in Year 1, and 20 kg ginger in Year 2), but after observing BHHs having a good harvest in the first year, decided against a second transfer.

**Simplified and context-specific procurement guidelines:** Providing project staff with clear, simple and context-specific guidelines and a thorough procurement orientation reduces the risk of procurement failures and misuse of resources. This should include regulations such as separating the field facilitators and supervisors from the procurement committee, recommendations such as having government or community groups witness asset disbursement/handover for increased transparency and accountability, and guidelines such as for what IGAs/inputs a tender process is suitable.

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46 CARITAS were not able to procure the amount of agricultural inputs required in local markets, and private sector distributors did not have the capacity to obtain the volume of quality inputs required at a fair price. HSI required over 60 tons of rice seed in a year.

47 HSI partnered with Lal Teer and ACI seed companies to provide customised packets of seeds to BHHs.

48 MJSKS quality issues resulted partially from a lack of skilled veterinarians to identify productive foundation stock, but also from unrealistic procurement timelines – i.e. all heifers to be procured in the first month of the project. This resulted in large numbers of purchased cattle requiring replacement.

49 EEP provided PNGOs with their procurement policy to be shared with staff and used for orientations, although this was general and not adapted to individual project contexts.
4.4 Linkage with Government

NGO-led delivery of interventions for the extreme poor risks supplanting government service provision. In the context of eradicating extreme poverty, appropriate engagement and linkage with government is critical to ensure the extreme poor gain access to a variety of services (health, education, water & sanitation, employment during the lean season, agricultural and livestock extension) and safety nets (pensions and other allowances for marginalised and vulnerable groups) to which they are entitled. It is often practical for donor-funded initiatives to operate in parallel to government, for ease and reliability of delivery, however a sustainable approach to eradicating extreme poverty should also facilitate increased supply and demand of government support. SF projects included differing levels of government engagement, offering several key lessons for future programming.

Combining supply and demand side interventions for improved service delivery: Many SF partners recognised the importance of increased demand for government support to the extreme poor, addressing this by raising beneficiary awareness of their entitlements, and facilitating collective advocacy to give the extreme poor a voice. More effective were approaches that actively involved government in delivering project activities to strengthen their role on the supply side, including: using government channels to supply inputs (vaccines, seeds, fertiliser); involving government extension workers in trainings for PNGO staff; and facilitating field visits for DAE/DLS staff to visit crop blocks and farmers. Other initiatives like developing IGA training materials for local government staff to keep and use in future; and

Recommendations – Asset Transfer:

- **Livestock should be locally-sourced to reduce mortality risk.** Skilled veterinarians should be involved in the procurement of livestock to identify quality stock, suitable for desired project outcomes.
- **Beneficiary-led purchasing can mitigate against procurement traps.** Processes and documentary requirements should be simplified as far as possible to reduce the burden on extreme poor beneficiaries.
- **Thorough analysis of the supplier base is required prior to procurement,** to select an appropriate route-to-market (private sector, government, locally sourced/’shopping’) to obtain quality inputs at the best price.
- **Successful asset procurement is driven by rigorous, realistic and staggered procurement planning,** with a strategy for mitigating slippage, to ensure:
  - Date of asset transfer aligns with seasonal requirements for agricultural cultivation (e.g. early crop yields in flood prone areas) or livestock rearing (e.g. planning for milk yields during monga season)
  - Market distortion is minimised, to guarantee stability of asset prices
- **Simple, context-specific procurement guidelines and procurement orientation sessions for staff mitigates procurement risk** and serves as a useful reference guide for operational staff.

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50 As just one example, groups of urban extreme poor under the DSK project were assisted to connect with the Dhaka Water Supply & Sewerage Authority (WASA) for their quarterly zone meetings, giving beneficiaries a voice with a government utility agency to demand a legal water supply for urban slums. DSK also linked urban beneficiaries with the City Corporation slum development department in order to give them a voice with elected commissioners who look after different wards.

51 Collecting vaccines from Upazila Livestock Officers (ULOs) or facilitating linkages with DAE for agricultural inputs, for example HSI who provided 95% of their BHHs with ‘Krishi Cards’ which give access to free or cheap agricultural inputs from DAE. Other projects procured seeds and other inputs from BADC, which was found to be cheaper and more reliable for bulk procurement than private sector suppliers.

52 This was widespread amongst PNGOs. For example, Concern Worldwide, whose project was unique for having a dedicated output relating to GoB service provision, actively involved relevant GoB departments in IGA trainings.
providing lists of BHH assets to Upazila Livestock and Agricultural Officers (ULO / UAO) were also useful.

**Importance of CBOs to ensure beneficiary access to government support:** SF projects incorporated voice, accountability and awareness-raising activities through the formation of village groups and federations to advocate for state services. The social capital generated by these CBOs also produced a variety of spill-over effects in the community, with advocacy groups playing a role in areas such as resolving marital difficulties, preventing child marriage, and protecting group members from eviction.\textsuperscript{53} CARE developed groups of Natural Leaders (NLs) in the community, who would support Union Parishad (UP) officials on critical aspects of their role including community consultations, tax collection, participatory planning & budgeting, and raising community concerns / claiming rights. UPs were also encouraged to complete self-evaluations, which helped to improve their effectiveness and resulted in the allocation of dedicated UP budget lines for extreme poverty issues.

**Importance of monitoring and measuring policy and advocacy activities:** Advocacy was given insufficient focus in SF projects, most of which did not include specific outputs for advocacy around extreme poor issues, or for access to services and safety nets. Even where SF projects made gains through policy advocacy activities, specific objectives and indicators in this domain were generally lacking, and so these gains were not explicitly measured or reported on. More data is required in order to monitor and measure the effectiveness of advocacy activities for the extreme poor to access services and safety nets.

**Advocacy is strengthened by adding value to government activities:** Advocacy efforts were more effective when framed as adding value to government officials, rather than as pressure for additional service delivery. This included combining increased demand for accountable service delivery with increased branding and visibility of GoB,\textsuperscript{55} or applying pressure through support to community consultations and participatory planning and budgeting, which effectively assists government officials with the requirements of their role.\textsuperscript{56}

**Sustained, persistent engagement is required to produce results:** PNGOs voiced the need for persistence in developing linkages with government, fostering relationships at all levels through continuous and sustained engagement. In the case of accessing safety nets, this meant not only submitting a list of eligible beneficiaries to the UP Chairman, but continuously following up, offering further information, inputs or assistance to process any administrative requirements. In the case of accessing khas land, progress was similarly made by consistent face time and follow up with land administration officials, and offers of assistance with the bureaucratic requirements for processing land applications.

**Project interventions can prejudice access to safety nets:** Several projects sought to increase beneficiary access to GoB safety net programmes such as disability allowance, widow’s allowance and old age allowance. This was achieved through a combination of raising BHH awareness of their entitlements, advocacy targeted at relevant government departments, and supporting BHHs with the logistics of safety net applications. Some PNGOs noted that the government was reluctant to provide social safety nets to beneficiaries already receiving support from other sources, and so support from SF projects oftentimes prejudiced BHHs’ ability to access safety nets. To focus efforts and maximise results, future interventions might consider only supporting access to long-term government safety nets for those HHs who have

\textsuperscript{53} S. Mustafa, H. Kabir, and M. Ambia. *Final Evaluation of AMADER Project Advancement of Marginalised and Deprived of Economic Resources*. December 2015

\textsuperscript{54} For example, PAB held national conferences/seminars, field demonstrations for GoB and DPs, international seminars and forums, but these were not measured or reported on. The evaluators recommended that future PAB projects develop an advocacy and communications strategy and include policy/advocacy objectives and indicators in project log frames.

\textsuperscript{55} Green Hill noted that increasing the branding/visibility of GoB facilitated closer coordination in the CHT.

\textsuperscript{56} CARE’s support to UP’s with pre-budget consultations and budget preparation, to include extreme poverty issues, was seen as making the job of government officials easier.
been shown to be less likely to benefit from productive asset transfer, e.g. elderly, disabled and female-headed/widowed households. The ‘breathing space’ extreme poor BHHs with productive capacity require to develop and invest in their IGAs could be provided through time-bound, project-funded cash stipends, or secondary assets with good short-term returns.

**4.5 Women’s Empowerment**

Women’s empowerment, whilst not an explicit objective of the SF, was a key feature of many projects. Some PNGOs exclusively targeted female beneficiaries, and others were indiscriminate in their support, and in both cases it was found that female-headed households were less likely to graduate than male-headed households. This important finding suggests the need to look for ways to ensure the core components of SF projects are gender-sensitive, but also to include specific and measurable women’s empowerment objectives in project designs. Some key lessons around women’s empowerment from SF projects and partners are summarised below:

**Need for explicit focus on women’s empowerment and interventions targeted at female beneficiaries:** One of the important outcomes of SF projects was increased social and political empowerment for women. Improvements for women included: increased bargaining power; increased voice in household matters; reduction in domestic conflict; increased participation in community events/weddings; more visibility buying/selling in local markets; reduction in the gender wage gap; more confidence to approach local authorities with issues; increased participation in local mediation/salish; more engagement in institutional and social committees; and participation in local elections. Even though some gains were made in projects which did not include targeted activities for female empowerment or a specific focus on female-headed HHs, evidence from the SF suggests that women’s empowerment should be an explicit focus of projects, rather than expected to emerge as a latent benefit. This requires specific and focused project gender strategies that are measurable and regularly monitored. Even SF projects that deliberately targeted female-headed households often lacked an adequate gender focus in project monitoring and evaluation (gender indicators,
gender-disaggregated data, and gender analysis), and lacked female front line staff available to interact with and coach beneficiaries.

**Female-friendly IGA selection:** Many SF partners found that female beneficiaries preferred year-round IGAs close to their homestead (livestock rearing, homestead gardens, tailoring and small trades), over labour-intensive and seasonal IGAs (rice cultivation, sandbar cropping, cage aquaculture). Even where agricultural IGAs demonstrated impressive potential and significant uptake by women, for example PAB’s innovative sandbar cultivation method, some beneficiaries viewed this more as a short-term stepping stone than a long-term option, due to labour-intensiveness and distance from the homestead. Even in ‘female-friendly’ homestead based IGAs, cultural barriers sometimes prevented women from purchasing livestock at markets or negotiating a fair price, even when accompanied by their spouses, or restricted women from selling vegetables from homestead gardens in markets. Female friendly IGA selection and business planning should take into consideration the specific constraints facing women, including time constraints arising from other domestic duties, and cultural barriers to participation in markets.

**Asset ownership and control of revenue:** Given that female-headed households are less prone to graduate, it is important to consider factors that prevent women’s empowerment even after they become asset owners. Evidence from EEP suggests that women’s control over IGAs is equally important as their access to productive assets, in terms of a role in financial decision making, ownership, management and operation. However, many SF projects encouraged women to relinquish operational control over IGAs, with the rationale that shared responsibilities can ease time management and cultural barriers to women taking on high potential, labour-intensive IGAs away from the homestead. For example, urban women in the DSK project were encouraged to opt for rickshaws that their male relatives or neighbours would then operate on their behalf, and HSI encouraged widows to engage in cash crop IGAs by enlisting the support of neighbours and family members for cultivation and harvest. This distinction between owner vs operator could be made more explicit when supporting female beneficiaries to select IGAs, to further encourage uptake of high potential IGAs and diversification away from livestock and other homestead-based IGAs as the default choice. The challenge for PNGOs is then to ensure the female retains clear ownership, management responsibility and control over revenue generated, and there is no clear evidence of best practice from SF projects on this issue.

**Development of women’s leadership through systematic group formation:** Projects that deployed specific group-based strategies to develop women’s leadership and tackle social norms around women’s place in society and the economy effectively increased women’s empowerment. There were many good examples under the SF of group-based programming for women’s empowerment. Initiatives like CARE’s EKATA women’s groups or HSI “Kishori” groups for adolescent girls discussed issues including dowry, violence against women and girls, early marriage, and wage discrimination, supported women to become advocates for family planning, and saw impressive results in reducing and eliminating harmful or discriminatory practices, including a reduction in the wage gap and complete elimination of early marriage. SF evaluations suggested that men should be involved in these group-based counselling and training sessions, where possible, to avoid creating imbalances or conflict in the home, and to support community-wide change to social norms.

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57 Pettersson, Marie Sophie. *EEP/Shiree Background Paper on Gender Aspects of Livelihoods Interventions with the Extreme Poor* [draft]. October 2014.

58 PNGOs implementing women’s empowerment interventions had difficulty making any progress at reducing dowry, suggesting that some social issues are more intractable than others and might require more specific social change strategies.

59 Uddin, S. R. *End of Project Review: EEP/Shiree – Managing Natural Resources by the Coastal Community (MaNaR) Project, Shushilgan, Bangladesh.* December 2015.
Access to land is inextricably linked with economic development, particularly in rural areas. The potential for the extreme poor to generate income is curtailed by a lack of access to cultivable land, or insecurity of tenure on land that is currently under cultivation. This limits the range of potential IGAs that the extreme poor can develop and diversify into, particularly for agricultural pursuits. Ownership or permanent lease of land also increases the social acceptance and dignity of the extreme poor. The SF supported several projects which explicitly incorporated a focus on securing access to land for extreme poor beneficiaries, primarily by assisting BHHs to submit successful applications for acquisition or long term leasing of unutilised khas land, by organising BHHs into groups linked to advocate for their rights, by directly advocating for government to support BHH access to khas land and waterbodies, and by facilitating multi year leases for BHHs to cultivate crops on privately owned land.

Access to khas land is a long term process: The SF demonstrated that the process of applying for khas land is long and cumbersome. Difficulties encountered included: length of time and number of steps required to process an application; lack of khas land processing capacity in local government; frequent transfer of government officials who have been the focus of lobbying efforts; lack of updated information on khas land and water bodies; and the lack of sustained effort, both from the landless poor and NGOs, to approach land officials and advocate for rights of extreme poor. Khas land processing activities therefore do not neatly fit within the 4 to 5 year donor programming cycle, and may require the longer time scales of multi-phase programmes to see impact.

Temporary settlement as immediate priority: PNGOs with experience in the land acquisition process noted that temporary settlement should be the primary objective of

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60 Public land owned by the government. The Land Reforms Ordinance (1984) and Agricultural Khas land Management and Settlement Policy (1986) dictate that landless people should receive agricultural khas land for cultivation.

bound projects, with a view to achieving permanent settlement where possible. In addition to facilitating formal long-term leasing or ownership of khas land, some PNGOs facilitated access to private land through negotiating long leases with landlords for BHHs to be able to cultivate land on a secure basis. HSI applied this approach in the haor areas, securing ‘gentleman’s agreements’ with landlords in addition to processing khas land applications, and this dual track approach supported BHH access to land during or in lieu of the long process of applying for khas land leasing or ownership. Another PNGO described how this approach can be precarious, as landlords leasing to extreme poor HHs do not always honour gentleman’s agreements, requesting the land back or demanding a higher rental price once BHHs have used their new inputs and skills to improve their plot and their income. This suggests that securing formal, enforceable lease agreements should always be preferred over informal understandings.

Consideration and consultation of land authorities in project planning and inception: Uttaran found that involving government early on in the project cycle helped to garner early support for the issue of access to land. Given the long timescales for supporting BHH access to khas land, involvement of relevant authorities from the early stages of project design and/or inception supports achievement of results during short project durations, and ensures sufficient attention is given to the interests (e.g. publicity and ownership) and constraints (e.g. resource constraints, mobility constraints) of the land administration. Unions where projects work should also be selected based on the availability of khas land, which should factor into the design and geographical targeting of interventions for extreme poor.

Multi-pronged advocacy efforts: PNGOs were able to speed up the processing times of khas land applications by applying different advocacy mechanisms at different levels including: building relationships with the local land administration; involving central GoB officials and the EEP Project Director in discussions over land access; and capacity building and engagement with local media. Successful engagement of the central bureaucracy to generate project ownership was also effective in facilitating dialogue with district and union level land officials. To ensure BHH access to khas land, Uttaran successfully deployed a range of initiatives including: strengthening beneficiary groups and federations and building their capacity to facilitate khas land processing; building the capacity of local government officials to process khas land applications; union and upazila level dialogue events and workshops to create linkages between landless people and the land administration; and workshops for journalists reporting on khas land and water bodies.

Building local capacity for sustainable land advocacy and litigation: Despite the success demonstrated by Uttaran, their project evaluation questioned the sustainability of this model, as beneficiary groups appeared to lack capacity to continue to process applications or spearhead mediation and litigation efforts without PNGO support. Shushilan’s project evaluation also noted that the process of leasing khas land and waterbodies should closely involve the beneficiaries rather than be undertaken on their behalf, so that they can retain and share this knowledge within their communities in the longer term. HSI acknowledged the limitations to this model of staff applying for khas land on behalf of BHHs, and trained LSPs to gradually assume this function, which both augmented results during the project cycle, as well as ensured sustainability beyond the project period.

A strategic and holistic approach to land access: The Uttaran approach was replicated by many SF partners, who attempted during the course of implementation to integrate some of the lessons around access to land into their own projects. This met with varied success, given the length of time and complexity of processes involved. For example, one SF project supported BHHs to achieve only the first of many steps in the land application process but

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62 An example was given of when the EEP Project Director sent a letter to district level land administration officials requesting their support for EEP khas land activities, which sped up processing times of applications.
63 58% of BHH had acquired khas land by the project endline and the remaining 42% were engaged in the process, with applications under way.
then took this no further. This raises the question of the value of partially investing in land access, given the lack of BHHs capacity to autonomously take this forward, and suggests a more strategic approach is required when addressing complex issues like access to land.

**PNGOs as catalysts or facilitators in land acquisition process:** Given limited project budgets and the long time scale of facilitating access to land, projects that implemented more catalytic or facilitating interventions – educating beneficiaries on the application process, training community champions or local service providers, linking beneficiaries with legal aid providers or community legal services, and advocating for government support – are likely to be more effective and sustainable than direct interventions that handhold beneficiaries throughout the *khas* land application cycle.

### Recommendations – Access to Land

- **A long term outlook is required for *khas* land programming,** premised on a ‘multi-phase’ programme cycle. Project designs should include appropriate mitigating measures in the event where longer term programming cannot be guaranteed.
- **Temporary settlement should be the immediate priority,** with a view towards long-term permanent settlements where possible.
- **Private land leases should be formalised and legally-binding,** given the possibility for abuse of ‘gentleman’s agreements’ with landlords.
- **Land authorities should be consulted early in project design and/or inception,** to garner early support for access to land, to focus project activities on unions with available *khas* land, and to support achievement of results during short project durations.
- **Advocacy efforts at multiple levels and using multiple channels are more effective,** engaging and building effective relationships with central as well as district/union administrations, and working with civil society, legal actors, and media.
- **Building the capacity of local service providers or community champions increases effectiveness and sustainability of land advocacy and litigation,** ensuring applications are taken forward after project funding ceases.
- **Complex land access issues require a strategic and holistic approach to land access,** instead of tackling smaller parts of a multi-stage process.
- **Programme design should acknowledge the catalytic or facilitating role of PNGOs and other development partners,** rather than rely too heavily on direct interventions.

### 4.7 Cross-NGO Learning

The EEP Challenge Fund was designed as a strategic, joined up programme with a common vision, so it is important for the SF to operate as a community of practice rather than a series of standalone projects. SF evaluations and conversations with PNGOs and EEP staff reveal significant cross-NGO learning in addition to within-project learning described elsewhere in this report, suggesting that the SF can be seen as a community of practice to improve extreme poverty programming in Bangladesh.

Notwithstanding the different contexts in which projects were implemented, field visits and roadshows to EEP projects and lesson learning dissemination events were successful in generating a sense of shared purpose, and PNGOs described how they were able to find commonalities even amongst the points of difference. For example, DSK was implementing the only project in an urban context, but was nonetheless able to observe lessons around common themes when visiting other projects in rural areas – for example the group approach to poverty reduction, and how other PNGOs were strengthening groups into legal organisations; or the voice and rights approach of organisations like Uttaran, which coincided with DSK’s thinking around demanding access to government services.
Sharing technical innovations improves service delivery: The major area where cross-NGO learning occurred was in technical innovations that could be applied across projects, and further afield. Uttaran’s khas land processing model was very successful and was replicated by many different organisations. HSI’s floating garden model was adopted by Shushilan, and was also used as a demonstration site visit for agricultural university staff and students. Caritas replicated the VSLA model of Green Hill. NETZ facilitated technical livestock officer visits to the MJSKS project areas to see milking cow profitability. Sometimes, however, there were missed opportunities for learning, for example the MJSKS project which failed to enhance the fat content in their milk, but which could have taken lessons from CARE who were succeeding in that enhancement by introducing coconut oil into cattle feed.

Cross-NGO learning can strengthen key processes, and supplement within-project learning to accelerate the refinement of approaches: While there was widespread evidence of borrowing technical innovations from other projects, as well as providing a demonstration effect to non-EEP stakeholders (agricultural universities, government livestock officers), there was less evidence of lesson-sharing around some of the key project processes. Some organisations recognised the limits to their corporate experience – for example, Oxfam visited Green Hill to learn about how to implement the savings process, as they had no institutional experience of savings instruments– but by and large PNGOs tended to learn from their own mistakes around IGA selection, asset procurement, group formation, and beneficiary training, rather than look to other implementing partners who potentially could have accelerated the learning process.

EEP Programme Managers drive learning, but should not replace bottom up learning: EEP Programme Managers provided significant guidance and direction to SF projects, helping to pre-empt common delivery pitfalls or to promote early sharing of best practices, for example by encouraging IGA diversification where the focus was initially too narrow EEP Programme Managers described how PNGOs were initially resistant to what they saw as the policing or monitoring function of the EEP team, but quickly came to appreciate the added value that EEP staff provide in facilitating cross-programme linkages, supporting lesson sharing and improving delivery models. While Programme Manager support can help to identify and share best practices across NGOs, and troubleshoot design issues, this should not replace bottom-up learning and information sharing within and between PNGOs.

**Recommendations – Cross-NGO Learning**

- **Sharing of successful technical innovations** provides valuable opportunities for NGOs to improve their services, and should be continued in future programming through lesson learning events and workshops, site field visits, and communications briefs.
- **Making linkages between implementing organisations early in the project cycle** ensures cross-learning refines and strengthens key processes, so that they are not routinely subject to the same pitfalls.
- **Within-project learning** can be accelerated or supplanted by cross-NGO learning where risks, issues and mitigation strategies are already available within the community of practice. This requires forward-looking, proactive and ongoing lesson learning (for example the regular regional coordination meetings under the SF), rather than concentrated at the mid and end line of projects.
- **EEP Programme Managers play a key role in facilitating sharing.** The regular visits of EEP programme managers helped to act as a conduit to raise awareness of innovations, share best practice, and provide direction. This should not be seen as a replacement for “bottom up learning”, where PNGOs take the initiative to do this themselves, thereby increasing their ownership.
5. Concluding Remarks

This synthesis report endorses the success of SF projects at graduating households out of extreme poverty, even though projects applied a diversity of approaches across different cultural, climatic and geo-topographic conditions. This bottom-up design process, facilitated by the Challenge Fund mechanism, generated a broad evidence base of both common and context-specific experience from which to draw lessons, showcasing best practices and underscoring areas for improvement. Learning was applied within projects and across NGOs, refining and improving approaches both through trial and error – “on the job” learning as implementation processes were refined – and through concerted efforts to operationalise lessons from projects elsewhere.

Despite the specificity of individual SF projects, evaluations generated lessons around common themes which were reinforced by discussions with PNGOs and endorsed by the outcomes of the recent lesson learning workshop. These are summarised as concise recommendations for the practitioner community around the following themes:

- ensuring high-potential, context-specific and beneficiary-appropriate IGA selection, through individual BHHs business plans which include both long- and short-term, on- and off-farm IGAs;
- bolstering the human capital value of the graduation model through strategic training programmes appropriately tailored to the extreme poor, supported by appropriate investment in human resources (both in terms of staff-to-beneficiary ratios, and technical support to front line staff on IGAs and business skills);
- avoiding procurement traps when purchasing and transferring assets and inputs in bulk, through robust procurement planning, a thorough understanding of the market and supplier base, and supporting beneficiary-led local purchasing where possible;
- strengthening linkages with government through a combination of supply- and demand-driven interventions, a measurable and regularly monitored policy and advocacy strategy, and a tailored approach to supporting access to safety nets;
- including interventions aimed at women’s empowerment and targeted support for female beneficiaries, by ensuring that barriers to women’s economic participation are factored into IGA selection, and by mainstreaming gender into project strategies, staffing and M&E;
- a catalytic and sustainable approach to facilitating access to land which is strategically planned around limited project durations, builds local capacity, involves government at an early stage, and deploys a multi-pronged approach to advocacy;
- accelerating within-project learning by looking to other practitioners for technical and process level innovations and best practices, through an ongoing, pro-active and forward-looking approach beginning at the project design stage.

The lessons and recommendations highlighted by this report were limited by the duration of the consultancy that produced them, and the dataset consulted. Some important thematic areas omitted in this report – including nutrition and savings – will be examined individually as ongoing activities in these areas wind down under the NCE. Thematic lessons included this report could be substantiated and elaborated by further in-depth research and analysis, as required, including cost benefit and econometric analysis to quantify the impact of different IGAs, delivery models, and approaches. Notwithstanding these caveats, this report highlights some invaluable insights generated by SF projects and PNGOs, for consideration by practitioners, policy-makers and donors in the design and implementation of future extreme poverty programmes.
Annex I: Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference
For the preparation of a Synthesis Report
Based on Scale Fund (SF) End Project Review Reports

1. Introduction
The Economic Empowerment of the Poorest (EEP/Shiree) programme is a challenge fund which began in 2008 and ends in March 2016. The programme’s aim is to help one million people take enduring steps out of extreme poverty. The bulk of the programme budget is allocated under ‘Scale Fund’ (SF) for large-scale application of proven approaches to extreme poverty reduction.

A total of 14 SF projects were undertaken under EEP/Shiree, all of which were completed by December 2015. Upon completion of each SF project, an End Project Review Report was prepared by independent consultants hired by the lead PNGO. The ToR for each review were prepared by each lead PNGO, based on a generic model prepared by the EEP/Shiree Managing Agency. The reports drew on field visits, a review of project documents and interview with key stakeholders.

2. Objective
The overall objective of the SF synthesis study is to document lessons learnt on a thematic basis, and provide some deeper commentary on the approaches by Scale Fund partners used to help BHHs graduate from extreme poverty.

3. Document structure
One over-arching synthesis report will be produced, which will be broken down and published as separate, short, standalone sections. These sections will provide concise thematic information for policy makers and practitioners who are dealing with extreme poverty programme design and implementation, as well as recommendations that could be considered in future programming. A proposed structure by heading is provided as Annex 1.

4. Scope and Issues to be addressed in the Study
The issues to be addressed include, but are not limited to:

1. How relevant and appropriate were the approaches and the designs of the projects towards tackling the extreme poverty?

This short section will recognise that EEP has been extremely successful, but will seek to identify whether project interventions altered significantly from their original proposal, i.e. to what extent learning was applied.

2. What were the unexpected outcomes of the interventions on the lives of the beneficiaries (both positive and negative)?

This question will be a cross-cutting theme that will run through the report: where identified, the unexpected outcomes will be reported on in each standalone section.

3. What are the key common lessons learnt from the experiences of these 14 SF projects towards the design and delivery of future extreme poverty projects, and how can they be addressed?

This cross-cutting question will be answered through the standalone sections that will form the bulk of this report. Each section will draw on lessons identified in the evaluation reports, lesson learning sessions, interviews with NGO partners and EEP programme managers, and other
sources of information as identified. Each standalone section will be limited to specific theme that draws on the lessons from all Scale Fund partners, and will have the ability to be independently published. Where possible, recommendations will be provided in each section.

The bulk of the themes will be identified or confirmed once the review of the report commences, however, the following themes for investigation have been identified: graduation, IGA selection, working with most marginalised households (e.g. FHH, elderly, disabled, and adivashi communities), cross-NGO learning, nutrition interventions, and improving sustainability of results.

5. Methodology

The study will be predominantly a desk-review of the following documents:

a) 14 scale fund end project review reports;
b) Project proposal, budget and key documents of the scale fund projects;
c) Reports and minutes of Scale Fund Learning meetings; and
d) All other sources of information as needed.

It is not expected that the documentation will be complete; hence there will be a need to validate findings, and clarify findings with key stakeholders. To that extent, discussion with EEP PMs and/or Project Directors of 14 SF NGOs, and communication with evaluation report authors will form an important part of this study.

It is expected that a significant amount of the work can be conducted remotely; however there may be two trips to Dhaka required in order to gain all relevant information, and validate findings and questions. The consultant is expected to keep close contact with the Ecorys Project Director and with the EEP/Shiree Operational Management Team to facilitate the planning and data collection.

6. Deliverables, Budget and Timeline

The consultant is expected to produce a report of 20 pages excluding any relevant annexes. The work is expected to be initiated in February 2016 and completed by the end of March 2016. The consultant is expected to submit the draft report by mid-March 2016. Then, based on the comments received from the reviewers, the consultant is expected to submit the revised report by 31 March 2016. The consultant is also expected to make a presentation of the report to DFID and EEP/Shiree before finalizing the report. Following approval of the report, the EEP Communications team will prepare the stand alone sections for publication and distribution.

A maximum of 24 workdays is allocated for this assignment; breakdown of total workdays are as follows:

- Review 14 SF Review Reports and key documents- 12 days
- Interview/meeting with EEP staff members- 2 days
- Interviews/meetings with PNGOs – 2 days
- Drafting the report- 4 days
- Participation in PNGO lesson sharing workshop- 1 day
- Debriefing (including preparation) to EEP/DFID- 1 day
- Final report preparation- 2 days

Acknowledging the relatively limited duration of this consultancy and information available, the final report is intended as a light touch review looking at overarching lessons, rather than a detailed analysis of the evidence base.
7. The Consultant
The study should be led by a consultant with experience and expertise on livelihoods and extreme poverty issues and interventions in Bangladesh. Support from the EEP team and Ecorys will be provided as necessary.

8. Management and Logistics
The Ecorys Project Director and COO of EEP/Shiree will maintain liaison with the study team. EEP/Shiree will make all necessary documents available for the consultant. EEP/Shiree will organize:

3.1 consultative meetings between the study team/Consultant and EEP/Shiree staff members and with PNGOs at mutually convenient time(s) upon request from the study team/Consultant;

3.2 de-briefing session for the study team to make a presentation on the report to EEP/Shiree and to DFID.

EEP/Shiree
4th February 2016
## Annex II: List of Consultations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afroz Mahal</td>
<td>Urban Manager</td>
<td>Oxfam</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>15 Feb 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sultana Nasrin</td>
<td>Senior Programme Officer</td>
<td>Oxfam</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>15 Feb 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arafat Alam</td>
<td>Research Coordinator</td>
<td>Oxfam</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>15 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saidur Rahman</td>
<td>Senior Programme Manager</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>16 Feb 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutapa Paul</td>
<td>Senior Programme Manager</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>16 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abdus Salam</td>
<td>Senior Programme Manager</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masud Rana</td>
<td>Senior Programme Manager</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree</td>
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<td>Delwar Hossain</td>
<td>Senior Programme Manager</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manotosh Madhu</td>
<td>Senior Programme Manager</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>16 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shamsul Alam</td>
<td>Senior Programme Manager</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>16 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Md. Abdul Matin Shardar</td>
<td>Team Leader, SETU Project</td>
<td>CARE Bangladesh</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>17 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Md. Zahid Hasan</td>
<td>Programme Officer</td>
<td>HELVETAS</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>17 Feb 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faria Shabnam</td>
<td>Programme Manager, Nutrition</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>18 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alomgir Husan</td>
<td>Programme Manager, Nutrition</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>18 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dipankar Chakma</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Helen Keller</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>18 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rezaul Karim</td>
<td>Senior Technical Manager, Horticulture</td>
<td>Helen Keller</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>18 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zamal Udden</td>
<td>Programme Manager</td>
<td>NETZ</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>18 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subash Anthony Gomes</td>
<td>Former Programme Manager, ESLEP-CHT Project</td>
<td>CARITAS Bangladesh</td>
<td>Cox’s Bazar</td>
<td>22 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Md. Rafiqul Islam</td>
<td>Programme Manager, ESLEP-CHT Project</td>
<td>CARITAS Bangladesh</td>
<td>Cox’s Bazar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jatan Kumar Dewan</td>
<td>Deputy Executive Director</td>
<td>Green Hill</td>
<td>Cox’s Bazar</td>
<td>23 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zakir Ahmed Khan</td>
<td>Head of Char &amp; Haor Programme</td>
<td>Concern Worldwide</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>24 Feb 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Dibalok Singha</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>DSK</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>24 Feb 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Najir Ahmed Khan</td>
<td>Chief Operating Officer</td>
<td>EEP/Shiree</td>
<td>Dhaka</td>
<td>25 Feb 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rafiqul Islam</td>
<td>Senior Programme Manager</td>
<td>Save the Children</td>
<td>Via Skype</td>
<td>2 March 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazmul Islam Chowdhury</td>
<td>Team Leader</td>
<td>Practical Action</td>
<td>Via Skype</td>
<td>9 March 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex III. List of Documents Consulted


Pettersson, Marie Sophie. *EEP/Shiree Background Paper on Gender Aspects of Livelihoods Interventions with the Extreme Poor*[draft]. October 2014.


### Annex IV: EEP/Shiree Multidimensional Poverty Index (ESMPI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential Criterion</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food coping strategies of household - eating</td>
<td>≥2 strategies = 0</td>
<td>≥2 strategies = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smaller portions, eating less than 3 meals per day, eating food of lower than normal quality, eating gathered food, eating no food in 24 hours, borrowing money for food, buying food on credit, sending family member elsewhere to eat, giving more food to earning household member, letting female household members eat last or not at all</td>
<td>&lt;2 strategies = 1</td>
<td>&lt;2 strategies = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementary Criteria</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty line - using the mean income and standard deviation in the HIES 2010 report for urban and rural areas, the poverty line corresponding to the lowest 10% was calculated separately for urban and rural areas as Taka per person per day. Government of Bangladesh inflation rates were used to generate new poverty lines for 2011, 2012 and 2013. Income included both cash and in-kind sources</td>
<td>2010 &lt;42.6 =0, ≥42.6 = 1 2011 &lt;45.9 = 0, ≥45.9 = 1 2012 &lt;50.9 = 0, ≥50.9 = 1 2013 &lt;55.1 = 0, ≥55.1 = 1 2014 &lt;59.2 = 0, ≥59.2 = 1 2015 &lt;63.0 = 0, ≥63.0 = 1 2010 &lt;46.9 =0, ≥46.9 = 1 2011 &lt;50.6 = 0, ≥50.6 = 1 2012 &lt;56.1 = 0, ≥56.1 = 1 2013 &lt;60.7 = 0, ≥60.7 = 1 2014 &lt;65.2 = 0, ≥65.2 = 1 2015 &lt;69.5 = 0, ≥69.5 = 1</td>
<td>&lt;2 income sources in household = 0 ≥2 income sources in household = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of income sources – number of income sources (earned income or social protection transfers) of all household members</td>
<td>&lt;2 income sources in household = 0</td>
<td>&lt;2 income sources in household = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash savings – amount of reported cash savings in Taka/household</td>
<td>&lt;1000 Taka/household = 0 ≥1000 Taka/household = 1</td>
<td>&lt;1000 Taka/household = 0 ≥1000 Taka/household = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of productive assets – defined as value of cattle, calves, goats, poultry, pigs, fishing nets, rickshaw, boat, sewing machine, cottage industry, agricultural equipment, mobile phone, bicycle, permanent shop, temporary shop, other permanent asset and other temporary shop asset</td>
<td>&lt;10,000 Taka/household = 0 ≥10,000 Taka/household = 1</td>
<td>&lt;7000 Taka/household = 0 ≥7000 Taka/household = 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of non-productive assets of household – defined as owning a television, radio, fan, jewellery, wooden box, blanket, table, wardrobe, chair, mattress and bed</td>
<td>&lt;4 assets = 0 ≥4 assets = 1</td>
<td>&lt;4 assets = 0 ≥4 assets = 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food diversity of household - rice, flour, pulse, potato, green leafy and other vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs, fresh/dried fish, poultry and meat</td>
<td>&lt;6 foods = 0 ≥6 foods = 1</td>
<td>&lt;6 foods = 0 ≥6 foods = 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nutrition - adult BMI OR anaemia of head of household if unavailable of another adult member</td>
<td>BMI &lt;18.5 OR anaemia = 0 BMI ≥18.5 and not anaemic = 1</td>
<td>BMI &lt;18.5 OR anaemia = 0 BMI ≥18.5 and not anaemic = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health - prevalence of fever OR diarrhoea over the last 30 days of head of household</td>
<td>Fever OR diarrhoea = 0 No fever and no diarrhoea = 1</td>
<td>Fever OR diarrhoea = 0 No fever and no diarrhoea = 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender Empowerment - of female adult member of household based on decision making and views</td>
<td>&lt;75% answering positively = 0 ≥75% answering positively = 1</td>
<td>&lt;75% answering positively = 0 ≥75% answering positively = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to safe drinking water of household - defined as meeting the MDG guidelines</td>
<td>No = 0 Yes = 1</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to hygienic sanitation of household - defined as meeting the MDG guidelines</td>
<td>No = 0 Yes = 1</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to cultivable land of household - all land comprising homestead, cultivable, temporary lease, sharecrop and use free of charge</td>
<td>No = 0 Yes = 1</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum score</th>
<th>Essential + 6 Supplementary</th>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Graduation threshold</th>
<th>Essential + 4 Supplementary</th>
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