

# ERADICATING EXTREME POVERTY: Whose responsibility is it?

October 25, 2011

## MDG 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty & Hunger

### What is extreme poverty?

Extreme poor households exhibit a high degree of chronic and severe deprivation. Their low income is linked to a lack of employment and secured shelter, low literacy rates, inaccessibility to credit, social safety nets and basic services, and low community involvement and participation in decision-making. The elderly, the disabled, minority groups and woman-headed households are disproportionately high among the extreme poor.

There are two official poverty measures in Bangladesh and both comprise of an upper and a lower extreme poverty line. The Daily Caloric Intake (DCI) measure identifies people consuming below <1,805 Kcal per day as extreme poor. The Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) measure defines people with per capita income less than BDT 25 (urban) and 23 (rural) as extreme poor (HIES 2005).

17.5% of Bangladesh's population is extremely poor, approximately 25.1 million people (HIES 2010).

Over 25 million people are prisoners of extreme poverty in Bangladesh. These people survive despite seriously challenging conditions, trying to make the most of what little resources or relationships they can draw from. They are illiterate, marginalised and for the most part, overlooked. But this is not an insurmountable problem. Many countries have overcome extreme (and moderate) poverty. We too can help our poorest citizens achieve freedom. If we are passionate, committed and strategic, together we can eradicate extreme poverty by 2015.

**NATIONAL GOVERNMENT** The national government has a leading role to play in ensuring policies that protect the rights of the poorest and promote their graduation out of poverty. Currently, more than 55% of the national budget is for poverty reduction initiatives. Much of the budget goes to one of many social safety net programmes developed to provide support to poor communities. There is a need to build a cohesive social protection strategy and coordinate efficient institutions to ensure adequate delivery of this support, as well as transparency, monitoring and impact evaluation.

“Policy makers need to identify the factors that have led to the marginalization of the extreme poor and take steps to address their needs accordingly. Extreme poor communities require a different set of approaches and fiscal provisions and policies should proactively address this.”

**Israfil Alam, MP**  
Chairman,  
APPG on Extreme Poverty

“Earlier this year, shiree and BRAC engaged in a pre-budget dialogue with a group of 20 MPs. Two of the key recommendations were to mobilise more resources for the elderly and the disabled as social welfare may be their only option, and to engage the youth in order to break the inter-generational transfer of poverty.”

**Sheepa Hafiza**  
Director,  
Gender, Justice & Diversity and  
Advocacy



S. K. Abu Baker, MP (Narail-2) discussing flood management measures with flood victims

“Our role is to support the honourable MPs by providing them with information and learnings so they may recommend pro-extreme poor budgetary changes or policy reforms in parliament. Preparing a pro-poorest national budget needs to be a participatory, transparent process to ensure resource allocation resulting in positive direct and indirect impact on the lives of the poorest.”

**Colin Risner**  
CEO, shiree



National poverty reduction strategies need to recognise that extreme poverty has its own dynamic and as such, requires a customised approach. The creation of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Extreme Poverty in 2009, through the combined effort of shiree, the People's Empowerment Trust and GoB, demonstrates GoB's commitment to the goal of eradicating extreme poverty through government mobilisation and policy reform.

“We will not be able to solve the problem with a piecemeal solution. All the political parties, development partners and social organisations should work collectively to solve the problem.”

**Shawkat Ali, MP**

Deputy Speaker, Co-Chairman,  
All Party Parliamentary Group on  
Extreme Poverty

“We visited two shiree projects in the south to see how thousands of people are dealing with floods. We hope to learn more about how we can help the extreme poor in remote and climatically challenging pockets of Bangladesh. We heard some recommendations for long-term strategies to reduce flooding are needed, as well as safe drinking water facilities, and permanent khasland transfers to support livelihood options for those living there. We are keen to do what we can.”

**Nani Gopal Mondal, MP**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

“Local government offices are closest to the extreme poor so they are well-positioned to hear the demands of the poorest to lobby for resources to meet these needs.”

**Sukomol Roy**

Project Manager,  
Action for Disability Development

“Several land officers have been particularly crucial in helping the extreme poor gain access to khasland. Without their support, the process would not move. Khasland transfers are complex processes and often local government officers have very little motivation to move the process along.”

**Abdul Khaleque**

Project Director, Uttaran

“My life was restricted before. After receiving livestock support, I have become empowered. My ability to earn income has earned me the respect of my community.”

**Zaheda Khatun**

BRAC beneficiary

“I have been able to provide many families with land, but the process is still long and complex, so efforts need to be made to make the process of attaining land easier for the extreme poor.”

**Md. Asaduzzaman**

AC Land, Paikgacha, Khulna



Livestock transfers are a way out of extreme poverty

“The strengthening of local government is the key to cutting poverty.”

**Akbar Ali Khan**

Former Caretaker Government Adviser

“Allowing the extreme poor to participate in local government initiatives has sensitised me to the issues of extreme poverty. It is essential that we, along with NGOs, work together to mainstream a proper identification process so that we can efficiently identify extreme poor households.”

**Saidur Rahman Sarker**

UP Chairman, Botlagari

“Livestock plays an important role in the national economy as it contributes directly to agricultural growth and provides employment, particularly for the rural poor. Landless people regard livestock as their only livelihood option.”

**Dr. Nizamuddin Mia**

District Livestock Officer, Khulna

“There was a real crisis; there was no drinking water. So we had to come together, assert our rights and demand that the Upazilla authorities provide us with a deep tube well. Now we all have safe drinking water.”

**Surma Begum**

shiree-Care beneficiary in Rangpur

MEDIA

“There are many instances where people in poverty make efforts to help others in their community and it's very important to highlight those people.”

**Mahfuz Anam**

Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star

“Media can play a strategic role in raising awareness about the rights and needs of the extreme poor.”

**Md. Saiful Islam Shameem**

Special Correspondent, Bangladesh Shagbad Sangstha



Victims of flood in Gaibandha



PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector has already been crucial in the economic mobilization of the poor through the creation of jobs. The government must encourage industrial expansion, in low and high value sectors, through pro-poor, environmentally-friendly, business-enabling policies. We have a huge and growing population, which could either be our greatest strength or biggest problem.

Companies can empower extremely poor people and improve their quality of life by providing them with innovative services and affordable products. Better interaction between private sector companies and those at the bottom, of the pyramid, establishes opportunities for direct involvement of the poor in the market economy.

“Mobile phones can transform the way NGO projects are monitored and managed across the country. Access to real-time information about households may increase an NGO’s potential outreach and impact by enhancing its ability for strategic decision making and targeted interventions.”

**Mridul Chowdhury**  
Founder, mPower Social Enterprises Ltd.

shree is currently using mPower’s innovative software and mobile technology to improve the monitoring and evaluation of projects serving over 200,000 extremely poor households across Bangladesh.

“The footwear industry in Bangladesh is growing rapidly but our biggest constraint is skilled and semi-skilled labour. NGOs, other development agencies, and the government can support the nation’s industrial growth by training labour. Now is the right time to act.”

**Syed Nasim Manzur**  
Managing Director, Apex Adelchi Footwear Limited

Apex Adelchi Footwear Limited joined up with shree partner NGO, GUK, to train and employ 800 extremely poor climate change refugees in Gaibandha.

“Corporate Social Responsibility is not about charity. It’s about business entities strategically creating win-win situations for the community and the company through different sustainable social investments which would eventually improve the lives of the extreme poor.”

**Debashis Roy**  
Head of CSR, Grameenphone, Bangladesh

“Everyone wants to work in cities, but not all of them are able to get a job. If there are more job opportunities in rural areas then instances of extreme rural poverty will decrease.”

**Md. Thuhid Bin Abdus Salam**  
Proprietor, Classical Handmade Products BD

“Co-profiting for development means engaging with private sector companies’ core businesses to help the poor.”

**Asif Uddin Ahmed**  
Project Director, CARE Bangladesh

CARE has helped link the extreme poor with over 25 private sector companies, for employment and product development.

“The government needs to provide infrastructure, power and access to finance in order to support private sector growth in rural areas.”

**Tamara Abed**  
Director, Aarong, BRAC Dairy and Food Project



Vocational training to help landless women secure jobs

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

International development partners have already committed large amounts of resources to help the extreme poor in Bangladesh. Donors should continue to work in partnership with GoB, NGOs, civil society, the private sector and others to maximise the consistency and effectiveness of external aid to Bangladesh.

“Bangladesh has achieved fantastic outcomes in poverty alleviation so far. If the government stays committed to eradicating extreme poverty, then development partners are willing to back it up with the resources required. Through collaboration and continued focus, we can achieve MDG1.”

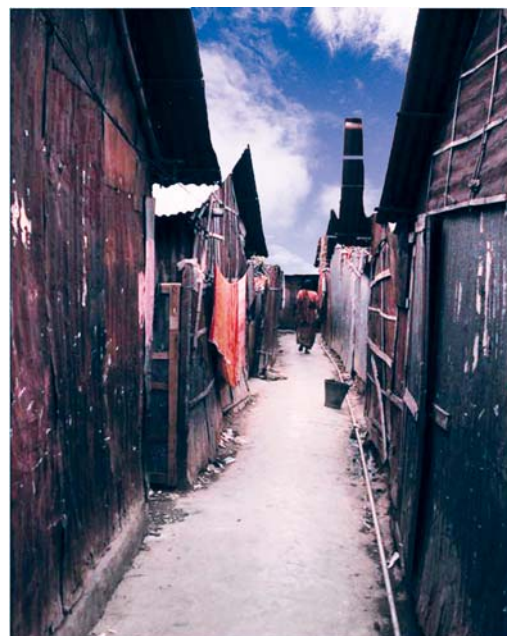
**Rachel Payne**  
First secretary, Development Cooperation, AusAid

“Extreme poverty has its own complex dynamics. We must address the specific needs of the extreme poor to help them graduate out of extreme poverty and merge into mainstream poverty reduction programmes and micro finance schemes.”

**Gwen Hines**  
Country Representative, DFID Bangladesh

“Fighting poverty is a top priority for the EU and we look for comprehensive responses to the problem, working on social, economic and governance issues at the same time. But we also support people directly affected by poverty. In the five years between 2004 and 2009 we have provided around 1.2 million people with food security related social transfers to get a better life here in Bangladesh, just to give you one concrete example.”

**Milko Van Goole**  
Counsellor, Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Bangladesh



4 million people in Dhaka live in slums

YOUTH

“In the past, youth movements have brought about revolutions. I hope our youths and will take the same initiative, as they have the potential to a bring hope to those who are less fortunate.”

**Badiul Alam Mazumdar**

Vice President and Country Director,  
The Hunger Project- Active Citizens Project

“Youth is power. If the government supports us, if the private sector finances us, if we all work together, then we can get amazing things done.”

**Korvi Rakshand**

Founder, JAAGO Foundation



Children playing in a day care at the pavement dwellers centre, Dhaka

NGOS

“NGOs can assist in the process of poverty alleviation but it is the Government who can solve the problems by mandate, through promotion of policies and practice of good governance.”

**Nazmul Islam Chowdhury**

Programme Manager,  
Practical Action Bangladesh

“Without the tireless work of CNRS, I would never have been able to get my share of khasland. Even with their help, the complicated process took a long time. I have started cultivating my land and hopefully by God’s will, I will be successful.”

**Mohammad Asadullah Rahman**

shiree-CNRS beneficiary in Sunamganj

“Our national agenda for poverty reduction in Bangladesh should include empowerment of the ultra-poor, by strengthening their social state, economical status and human energy so that they may become self-reliant and a part of the mainstream development effort.”

**Sir Fazle Hasan Abed**

Chairperson, BRAC



Making markets work for adivasi women in the hills

“The hidden hunger is acute among the dependent poor such as elderly, women or child-headed households, disabled and most marginalized population. Their rights are being violated constantly. Most of them are incapable of contributing to the economy, are treated as burdensome, and are unnecessarily being harassed. Our government should have a comprehensive social protection policy to take full responsibility of this population so NGOs can work those who have production potential.”

**Dr. Munir Ahmed**

Chairperson, Extreme Poverty Research Group  
Director, Save the Children

“Slum dwellers constantly face with the threat of eviction. We need to take steps to ensure that they are not just left homeless and are rehabilitated safely.”

**Md. Abdul Baten**

Coordinator, Research  
shiree-DSK

CONCERNED CITIZENS

“If an unmarried woman or girl is disabled, the family looks after her by providing shelter, food and a little bit of care. But if a married woman becomes disabled then she does not have any place to go. After a while, her husband will leave her and she is left without any support.”

**Mohua Paul**

Director Resource Mobilisation, Access Bangladesh

“Distance from services and a general lack of access to information has led to further marginalisation of the adivasi community. It is essential that NGOs and the government take the appropriate steps to fill these gaps.”

**Raja Devasish Roy**

Chakma Raja, Barrister & Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Extreme Poverty Day

**October 25, 2011**  
**Bashundhara Convention Centre**

This event intends to build awareness and create opportunities to eradicate extreme poverty. Thirty five organisations fighting extreme poverty around the country will share their experiences. Fifteen change-makers will share their thoughts about the challenges and opportunities. By bringing together the government, donors, private sector players, NGOs and extreme poor communities, we will build partnerships that enable us to make positive, sustainable changes. Please get in touch with us if you want to get involved to help achieve MDG 1.

shiree

The Economic Empowerment of the Poorest programme is a partnership between UKaid from the Department for International Development and the Government of Bangladesh, which aims to lift one million people out of extreme poverty by 2015. The programme is more familiarly known as shiree (the Bangla word for ‘steps’) because of its approach: to create opportunities for households to climb out of extreme poverty.

shiree works through 33 NGOs in the most vulnerable regions of Bangladesh: the northwest (seasonal hunger region), the northeast (haors), the southern coastal (flood prone) belt, the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Dhaka urban slums.

shiree promotes research, learning and advocacy to enhance the understanding of extreme poverty and influence policy and practice at national and local levels in favour of the extreme poor.

For more information, please visit [www.shiree.org](http://www.shiree.org)

BRAC

BRAC is a development organisation dedicated to the alleviation of poverty by empowering the poor. Founded in Bangladesh in 1972, BRAC’s holistic approach to development encompasses activities in education, health, microfinance, legal aid, community empowerment, environment and food security. With over 100,000 staff and a billion dollar operating budget, the programmes scale-up to touch the lives of over 138 million people in ten countries.

BRAC’s mission is to empower people and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, diseases and social injustice. To ensure sustainability, BRAC operates social enterprises and socially responsible investments. BRAC’s values are innovation, integrity, inclusiveness and effectiveness.

For more information, please visit [www.brac.net](http://www.brac.net)

BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council is UK’s representative for education and cultural relations. The purpose of the British Council is to create international opportunities between people of the UK and other countries and to build trust between them worldwide.

British Council operates in 109 countries around the world in the areas of English, Citizenship, Arts, Climate Change, Education and Governance.

For more information, please visit [www.britishcouncil.org/bangladesh](http://www.britishcouncil.org/bangladesh)

