



#### ABOUT THE HUNGER PROJECT

The Hunger Project has a 37-year track record of partnering with people living in poverty as they work to end their own chronic hunger. Our approach is based on **three fundamental pillars**: (1) Mobilize people at the grassroots level, (2) Empower women as key change agents of their own development, and (3) Forge partnerships with local government. Our work reaches nearly 20 million people in 17,000 communities in Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

#### THE HUNGER PROJECT IN BANGLADESH



**171**  
MDG unions reaching over  
4.5 million people



**170,000**  
trained volunteer leaders



**1,200**  
girl-child marriages halted by  
direct program interventions

#### A NATIONWIDE NETWORK

Through two national-level networks, the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum and Shujan (Citizens for Good Governance), The Hunger Project advances programs aimed at changing national dialogue and policy-making on girl child rights and sound democratic governance, respectively. Through these platforms, The Hunger Project maintains a broader reach among urban-residing Bangladeshis.

## THE HUNGER PROJECT-BANGLADESH SOLIDARITY WITH GIRL CHILDREN

### From Subjects to Citizens

Despite Bangladesh establishing a democracy in 1990, government corruption is pervasive and key development challenges exist. The prevalence of child malnutrition is nearly 40 percent, one of the highest in the world, and 31 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. People in Bangladesh still live as subjects to an unresponsive government rather than engaged citizens for change.

The Hunger Project-Bangladesh works in partnership with local elected leaders and community members to catalyze sustainable, inclusive, local-led development that eschews a structure of dependency. In order to be sustainable, this accountability must take place at the level closest to the people, the Union. Once partnerships are established with Union Parishads (Councils) to form Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Unions, all 12 elected members receive a five-day training in the principles of bottom-up development, decentralized democracy, accountable governance, and how to be effective leaders in their roles to work for positive change in their Unions.

The Hunger Project is uniquely poised to reach over 4.5 million people through awareness raising, skill building workshops, social action projects, and local policy development.

### Volunteer-based Change and Leadership

The centerpiece of The Hunger Project's strategy is the over 170,000 trained volunteer leaders, Animators, who mobilize their communities for self-motivated, sustainable action in partnership with their elected leaders. Animators participate in volunteer trainings, and then develop visions and plans for their communities with a future beyond hunger and poverty. Community plans include specific actions for community members based on identified needs, including Savings Groups, to which men and women are able to contribute weekly savings and have access to a loan fund, Adult Literacy Clubs, or the founding of Primary Schools.

### A Partnership between Men and Women

The majority of those battling chronic hunger in Bangladesh are women and children, a result of discrimination and exclusion within Bangladeshi society. Traditional practices such as dowries, child marriages, and the relegation of being last to eat have created a discriminatory sociopolitical context for girls



### PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF GIRLS

The Hunger Project-Bangladesh has designed an innovative program that targets young and motivated community members, the Youth Ending Hunger Program. This program provides leadership workshops and skills trainings to mobilize community youth to understand their role in society as change makers.

Shapla Banu is 13 years old. After participating in a Youth Ending Hunger study group on the topic of child marriage, Shapla met her elected ward member, Ms. Rajja Sultana. Ms. Sultana communicated the risks of child marriage, and Shapla vowed to wait until 18 to get married in order to attend University and become a teacher.

However, Shapla's parents were swayed by a marriage proposal from a wealthy man in their community. Faced with her imminent marriage, Shapla remembered Ms. Sultana's support at the Youth Ending Hunger study group. She called her for help, and within an hour Ms. Sultana arrived and explained Shapla's rights and urged her parents to reconsider. Shapla's mother spoke out for the first time against forcing her daughter to marry at such a young age. She had seen what damage it does to a young girl, and finally found the courage to speak up on behalf of her daughter's rights.

As a result of this network of citizens formed through THP trainings with youth and elected leaders, Shapla and her mother found the courage to stand up for her rights. She is still studying to become a teacher.

and women. Animators and Union Parishad Chair Members address this head on by building partnerships between men and women to stop the cycle of malnutrition, and by promoting the inclusion of women and girls in decision-making processes and leadership roles.

### Poverty and Girl Children in Bangladesh

Severe gender discrimination perpetuates a cycle of malnutrition in which girls are taught to eat last and least. Girl babies are fed less nutritious food than their brothers and they are often denied health care and education. Young girls are often married and become pregnant too early – before their bodies have fully developed. As mothers and wives, they are denied participation in decision-making and confined to their homes and villages. They are underweight and malnourished when they give birth to the next generation – who are born underweight and malnourished – and the cycle of malnutrition continues.

### History of National Girl Child Day in Bangladesh

In response to the deeply entrenched gender discrimination, The Hunger Project created the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF), an alliance which has grown to 500 organizations as of 2014. The goals of NGCAF are to:

- Build awareness of the importance of valuing girls
- Support to secure girls' rights
- Advocate policies that improve girls' lives

NGCAF inaugurated National Girl Child Day on September 30th, 2000. Activities take place each year through nationwide rallies, marches, and school-based activities. NGCAF organizations generate mass media coverage and an open discussion on the importance of providing better health, education, and nutrition to girls. NGCAF joined the Girls Not Brides Alliance in 2013.

### Halting Early Marriage

The Hunger Project's work to foster the enabling environment that young girls need to flourish is achieved through a three-pronged strategy of multilevel awareness building through campaigns, courtyard meetings and extensive dialogues; capacity building through issue-based trainings and workshops; and policy advocacy at the national level. In 2013, The Hunger Project volunteer leaders reported stopping over 1,200 girl-child marriages by direct program intervention. Volunteer Animators and Youth Leaders throughout Bangladesh have taken the initiative to form Halting Early Marriage clubs that raise awareness on the hazards of marrying young. The club comprises community members of all ages and backgrounds, working together to hold rallies, courtyard meetings, and youth study groups to increase knowledge of child rights.