

## Sustainable Livelihoods for Poor Producers in Northern Bangladesh (SLIPP)

This five-year project is reducing poverty among poor and marginalised communities in two poor districts of northern Bangladesh (Mymensingh and Netrokona) by increasing income and employment opportunities.



### What problem or need is the project addressing?

Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest countries. About 40% of Bangladesh's 147 million people live in abject poverty. Despite seeing a significant reduction in poverty levels over recent years, challenges (such as climate change and the economic crisis) have reversed the trend and increasing numbers of people falling back into poverty. Poverty reduction is therefore a top priority.

Northern Bangladesh, where SLIPP is working, is one of the poorest parts of Bangladesh. People living here often depend on work which is seasonal, poorly paid and exploitative. As a result, they remain trapped in poverty and become increasingly marginalised.

Small businesses have the potential to provide opportunities for work and reduce poverty. Unfortunately though, these businesses face numerous challenges and struggle to become economically viable. The majority receive no business support, so their problems persist, they fail to become viable, and their employees remain poor and marginalised.

### What is the project doing?

The project is training over 250 local organisations and individuals to provide vital services and support to 2500 small producer businesses. Improving the business performance of these small businesses is in turn increasing employment and income generating opportunities for poor producers. Each small business provides employment to at least 3 poor producers. This means the project will work with at least 7,500 producers and with an average family size of five, it will directly benefit at least 37,500 people.

The project is also encouraging small businesses and poor producers to work to improve their situation. By working collectively, they can share the costs of buying business inputs and accessing markets, and negotiate more effectively with potential buyers. Through local level groups and district level associations the producers are also able to influence local, national and international policies and practices which have a direct and often negative impact upon their livelihoods. This is empowering them to demand their rights to, for example, a fair price, a fair wage, decent living and working conditions, access to healthcare and other essential social services.

We carried out research to identify which sectors we should concentrate on for maximum impact. Vegetable cultivation, fish-farming and duck-rearing were chosen as target sectors.

### What impact has the project had?

We are delighted with the impact SLIPP is having in the target districts. Demand for involvement in the project has far exceeded the help we can provide, despite us more than doubling the number of producers we are working with from the 1,200 originally planned to 2,500. There is obviously a limit to the number of producers we can support, but by training local organisations and individuals to provide ongoing support and services in the area, producers that are not covered by SLIPP will also be able to benefit. We have also successfully established strong relationships with local government organisations that are providing support to small businesses in the area.

The 2,500 producers have been organised into 100 producer groups and are already seeing the benefits of working collectively. Many of these groups are jointly buying and selling things such as raw materials and business services, and seeing significant cost-savings. They are also negotiating with buyers and local government and several groups have also secured grants/loans.

Four district-level associations have been established and are actively interacting with government and private stakeholders, voicing the issues of the small-scale producers they represent, demanding their rights are protected and negotiating fair trading relationships.

326 business service providers (against a target of 60 business service providers) have been trained to provide cost-effective services to the producers and have increased their sale by 25%. Ten government bodies are also providing support services, and demand for these services has increased by 100%.

So far, 1,500 (60%) of producers involved in the project have increased their productivity and sales by 30%, reduced their production costs by 25%, and consequently have increased their disposable income by 15%.

Madina Begum is just one of the people for whom life has dramatically changed for the better as a result of participating in the project, progressing from an ultra-poor home-maker with just 20 ducks to a successful business woman and an outspoken representative for her community. See [Madina's story](#) for the extraordinary story of how her life has been transformed.

SLIPP is coming to an end in April 2012, but we are delighted to have secured a grant for a follow-on project to expand this work to a greater number of people. See the [Sustainable Livelihoods through Small-Scale Agriculture](#) page for more details.

#### Our local partner

Traidcraft Exchange is implementing this project with [DEW \(Development Wheel\)](#). DEW works to "enhance household livelihood security of the poor by increasing their participation, in small-scale economic activities with a range of business and other life skills".

#### How is this project funded?

The project is funded by the European Commission, grant-making trusts, and donations from generous individuals.

