

# 36 Years of Journey for Landless Farmers

"A documentation of Uttaran's experience on facilitating landless farmers in accessing Khasland."



**Uttaran**

# Why and How ?

Uttaran, which means 'transition', in Bangla language has been living up to its name through a myriad of development interventions since 1985 to uphold the rights of the poor and underprivileged. The organization was founded with the aim of building a society free from all inequalities where everyone can access and aware of their basic rights.

Land is a finite, scarce and highly competitive resource in the context of rural livelihood and economy. Around 80% of the population is directly or indirectly involved in agriculture or fisheries. Majority of the farmers in Bangladesh are asset poor and therefore they are either landless or sharecroppers. As they do not have any permanent assets, they are not being able to fully utilize their skills as farmers and therefore are forced to leave their ancestral profession and migrating to cities to work in the informal sectors. Historically, since the British period State has ignored the interest of marginalized and small farmers and patronized large land owners and powerful elites in the society.



# Why and How ?

Before the British Rule in India land was not a commodity and could not be purchased. Thus land remained in control of farmers. However during the British Period, state took control over all the land and Jamindars became the absolute proprietors of land. Thus farmers lost control over land and in a sense became their slaves. After years of revolution and struggle the farmers finally got their land rights when the tenancy act was passed in 1885. This time land again went back to farmers, however, land also became saleable product. Weaker and less powerful farmers were either forced or conned to sell/ give away their entitled lands to powerful local elites as they were not aware about the laws or were fearful of their torture. These land elites were also patronized by Jamindars thus small farmers became more vulnerable and slowly became landless.

Once again to set things right, the Jamindari system was abolished in Bengal in 1950 and state gained control over this huge amount of land which is currently known as Khasland. Right after the independence of Bangladesh through the 1972 PO 98/72 State decided to distribute Khas agricultural land and Khas water-bodies among the landless farmers. In 1987 the government adopted Khasland distribution policy through which the state clarifies the process of Khasland distribution. Later in 1997, Khasland settlement Policy was introduced which is currently used to distribute Khasland among the landless farmers who has less than 10 decimal of land.



# Why and How ?

Since its inception Uttaran has been organizing landless people in Satkhira, Khulna, and Jashore districts. In 1988, Uttaran formed its first landless groups, since then has organized, mobilized and developed the capacity of hundreds of thousands of landless farmers across its working areas so that they are able to claim their rights over land. To strengthen the voice of the landless, Uttaran has also formed and facilitated civil society organization known as Bhumi (Land) Committee. Bhumi Committee stands by the landless people in their fight to claim their rights. Uttaran created a strong a network among landless people, civil society and other local organizations which proved to be a powerful strategy in ensuring access to Khasland. Not only that, Uttaran has also worked on the supply side as well as we have developed the capacity of local government institutions and helped the authorities to identify landless and transfer khasland among them. So far Uttaran has successfully managed to support the Government of Bangladesh in distributing 19051.84 acres of Khasland among 43,487 families, which monetary value is BDT 38,103,680,000 (240,211,428 GBP), We are, therefore, considered the pioneer among leading national organizations to promote rights for small, poor and marginalized landowners as well as the landless.



# Why and How ?

However the journey to this was not smooth at all. From 1988 to 2003, Uttaran did not receive any formal support from any donor. But Uttaran continued its effort as it fits with our mission to establish a society with caste class and gender equality. In this journey, many of landless farmers were tortured by local land grabbers who were backed by local administration. Jayeda one of our women landless leader was killed in 1998 and thousands more were wounded when land grabbers and local administration opened fired on them. After this incident the government decided to accept the demand of the landless people and state started the process of distributing Khasland. However, local administration lacked man power to identify Khasland and landless people and therefore Uttaran started to facilitate the process. However it took almost another 6 years for a formal donor to start funding this process of Uttaran.

Uttaran is grateful to UK Aid who first formally started to support the land right movement of Bangladesh and through ManusherJonno Foundation supported the land rights program of Uttaran. Later additionally UKAid supported Uttaran through shiree project. European Union also came forward to support Uttaran's land rights initiative. The following pages describe Uttaran's journey and achievement in land rights sector starting from 2004 to till now.



# ***"Asserting Popular Access and Rights to Resources in Southwest Bangladesh' - APAR"***

Uttaran officially embarked on its journey of empowering the marginalized landless people by establishing their rights to khasland and khaswater-bodies in 2004 through the project titled 'Asserting Popular Access and Rights to Resources in Southwest Bangladesh', also known as 'APAR'. With support from DFID/FCDO through Manuser Jonno Foundation (MJF) Uttaran and successfully implemented the project in 11 upazilas of Bangladesh. In order to reduce social and economical disparities APAR strived for developing the capacity of the organized primary groups of the resource- poor people and inter- group structures as alternative institutions. APAR, which ended in 2013, directly improved over 28,000 families livelihoods by facilitating their access to public resources and helping them acquire new and relevant livelihoods skill.

Aim: To reduce social, economical and political inequalities and injustices particularly landlessness, poverty and underdevelopment caused by denial of rights, inadequate access to public resources, ill-governance and violence.





## Project Area:

57 Union Parishad of following 5 districts

**Khulna:** Dumuria, Batiaghata and Paikgacha

**Satkhira:** Tala, Assasuni, Shyamnagar, Kaligonj and Debhata

**Jashore** - Sharsha

**Rajshahi** - Tanor

**Pabna** - Chatmohor



## Highlights:

### **Uttaran led this project with 10 local partners**

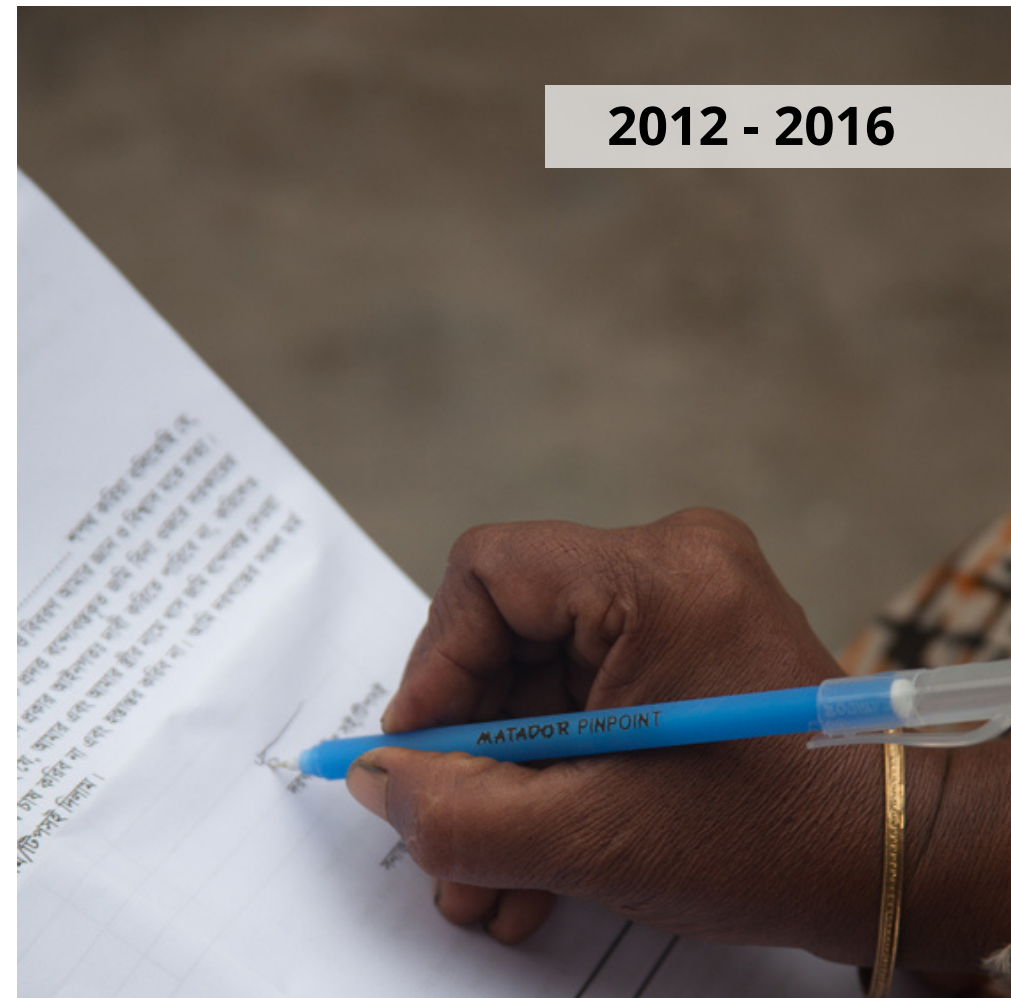
- 1400 primary organizations have been formed
- 28200 households received direct support
- 14,300 families received 10,568.3 acres of khashland and water bodies (Among them 8263 people got 4113.17 acres of khasland on a temporary basis, 3227 landless fisher folk people got 4375.59 acres of Jalmohal and 2,810 people got 2079.54 acres on permanent lease)
- Capacity building for 57 Union Parishad regarding good governance and human rights, mediation, land rights, women and child rights.
- 18,427 households got awareness through providing right-based and occupational training,
- 36 higher court cases, 460 lower court cases and 455 meditations.
- 567 people supported by higher court cases, 769 people supported by lower court case and 487 people supported by mediations.



## ***"Sustained and Expanded Effort to make the ultra-poor out of extreme poverty by transferring assets, cash and skill in an integrated Approach"***

Uttaran's 'Sustained and Expanded Effort to make the ultra-poor out of extreme poverty by transferring assets, cash and skill in an integrated Approach' project evolved from the decade long movement and its experiences for facilitating the landless farmers. This was a milestone for Uttaran's effort, the sacrifices Uttaran's founder Shahidul Islam has made and the torture he went through during 2007. In 2007 during the emergency period he was arrested and physically tortured. The main cause of his torture and arrest was mentioned that he organized landless families. In April 2009 Uttaran with the support from DFID/SDC through shiree implemented the SEMPTI project reaching 32,948 extreme poor HH. Through the project, 20,227 BHHs received 3890.40 acres of khas land; either on a permanent basis or temporary. In addition, 32,948 BHH received grant support for diversifying their livelihood options.

Aim: Government of Bangladesh MDG targets 1 and 2 on income poverty reduction and hunger achieved by 2015.





## Project Area:

**53 Union Parishad of  
11 upazilas of  
Satkhira** - Satkhira  
Sadar, Tala, Debhata,  
Assasuni,  
Shyamnagar Kaligonj  
upazila  
**Jashore** -  
Monirampur and  
Jhikargacha upazila  
**Khulna**- Dumuria,  
Batiaghata and  
Paikgacha upazila.

# Highlights:

- **Uttaran leded this project with four partner NGOs.**
- 1,640 landless people's PO have been formed
- 20,227 families received 3890.4 acres of khashland and water bodies (Among them 17,334 families received 2032.27 acres of khasland on a temporary basis, 965 landless fisher folk people got 1039.88 acres of water bodies, 1928 families received 818.25 acres of khasland as permanent basis)
- 40 fisher folk group and community based organizations received registration support from the Government's Cooperative Dept.
- Capacity building of 53 Union Parishad regarding land law, livelihood, women and child rights
- 32,948 HH received IGA training (The cost of this activity was BDT 5327400)
- 32,948 HH received cash grant support amounting BDT 10,000 or BDT 14,000, or BDT 16,000 Taka for IGA – (Cost of this activity was BDT. 414,000,000)
- 20,895 HH received 6 varieties of vegetable seeds (Cost of this activity was 20,895,000 Taka)
- 20,227 HH received process cost for accessing the khasland (Each of the family received BDT 2000 and cost of this activity was 40,454,000 Taka).
- 11 higher court cases, 78 lower court cases and 25 meditations were conducted. 1586 people supported by higher court cases, 203 people supported by lower court case and 384 people supported by mediations.

## ***"APARAJEO- Access to Public resources by Asserting Rights And Justice for Economic Opportunities"***

The APAR Project reinforced the notion that Khas land distribution increases the agency of the landless and provides them with sustainable livelihood opportunities. Therefore, its successful implementation was followed by a new project that used the previous learnings and experience and came up with an innovative approach to encourage participation and awareness. Thus, the project titled 'APARAJEO- Access to Public resources by Asserting Rights And Justice for Economic Opportunities' came in place. It formed an additional 442 primary organizations with participation of 44,000 landless and poor and brought about significant changes in the resource structure of the project areas. This project was funded by DFID/FCDO through Manuser Jonno Foundation (MJF).

Aim: To make a total of 44,000 landless people of Khulna and Satkhira district self-dependent through increasing their rightful control over public resources as well as services and help them break the cycle of poverty through livelihood improvements.





## Project Area:

35 Union Parishad  
of 7 upazilas

### **Satkhira:**

Debhata, Kaligonj,  
Shyamnagar,  
Assasuni and Tala  
Upazila

**Khulna:** Paikgacha  
and Dumuria  
Upazila

# Highlights:

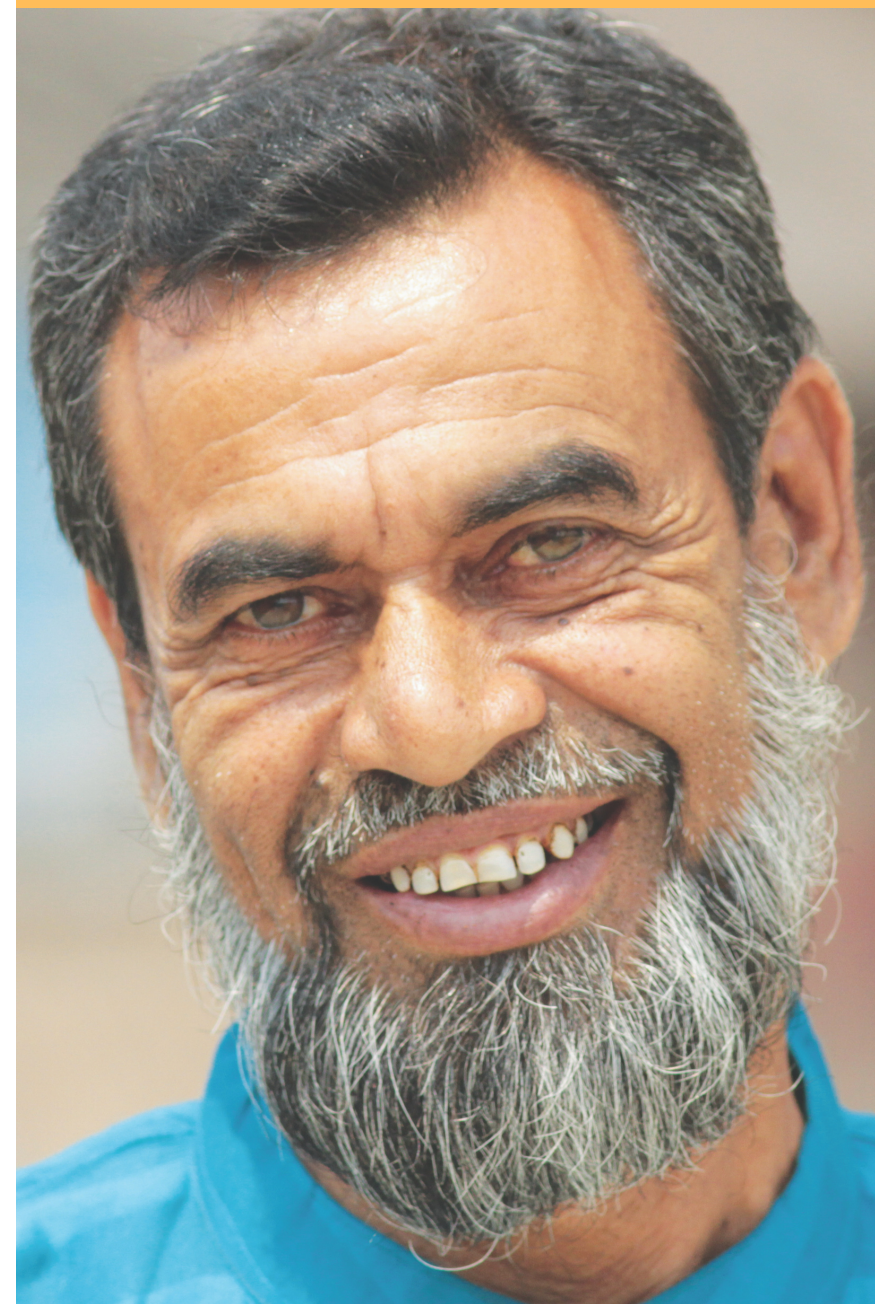
- 442 PO and 30 Gonno Unnayan Federation (vertical network of POs) formed
- 12,331 HH supported
- 7,654 HH have access over state owned 3148.55 acres of land (Among them 1052 people got 465.85 acres of khasland on a temporary basis, 600 landless fisher folk people got 755.67 acres of Jalmohal, 601 people got 416.45 acres on permanent basis and 5401 people possessed on 1510.58 acres of khasland)
- Capacity building of 35 Union Parishad regarding land law and social safety net services.
- Additionally 6,737 applications for accessing khasland were submitted to Government land office
- 15 Food Banks were established to provide food loan among 13,266 HH
- 12,331 people received and linked with the Government. Safety net programme.
- 11 higher court, 113 lower court cases and 198 mediations were conducted. 461 people supported by higher court case, 770 people supported by lower court case and 248 people supported by mediations.

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Faizul Islam, a great friend of the landless of the South-West Bangladesh and one of our valuable comrades. He will be remembered as the revolutionary spirit who fought for the rights of the landless and made significant contributions in helping establish the entitled rights of these vulnerable people. Our thoughts and prayers are with his bereaved family.

Mr Faizul Islam was a leader for many and a ray of hope for the landless communities of Debhata Upazila. He was one of first people to join the revolution and was brave enough to claim his rights in front of all the odds. Mr Faizul grew up in a landless family in Debahta Upazila. Like many landless in this country he had no land to live and no permanent address. He moved from one place to another as he was regularly moved away by powerful landowners. During the landless movement, Faizul was involved with Uttaran and took part in the famous landless movement of Debhata. He was one of the frontline leaders. After that famous movement, Faizul with the help of Uttaran occupied one acre of Khasland. In 2011 almost after 13 years of struggle, both his wife and he got permanent settlement of that 1 Acre of land with the help of Uttaran. That land was a change of all his past and a faith that the bright will be better. In that piece of land Faizul cultivated fish and vegetables. At the same time, he also planted many fruit bearing trees as well. Over the years he earned more than BDT 200,000 annually. Faizul is survived by his four sons and two daughters. His two daughters are now married and living a happy life in their in-law's place. His two elder sons are now working in Pabna district while both his younger sons are now studying engineering in Malaysia. His wife now also accessed a loan for sending his youngest son to Malaysia for higher studies.

His wife recalls those days when she and her husband worked as day labour earning less than BDT 100 a day and found it very difficult to feed seven mouths for a day. They were in the bottom tier of the social class with no respect and dignity. Even microcredit organizations did not provide them with any loan since they did not have a fixed address. But now things have changed and if Faizul is no more his family has been well respected in the society. They now have a big brick house and are regularly accessing BDT 30,000 loan from Agrani Bank for aquaculture. Till his last day, Faizul took an active role to help other landless in his community to get access to Khasland. He was a member of Uttaran's Debhata Bhumi Committee and an inspiring person to many poor people in the area.

## Heroes never die



## ***"Access to Public Resources and opportunities to Increase Rights of the Discriminated Hindered and Oppressed (APROTIRODHO)"***

As time went on Uttaran kept establishing the fact that land reformation is proven method for poverty alleviation and upholding human rights thorough a number of consecutive initiatives. APROTIRODHO is a true successor of the previous projects as the amalgamated knowledge and experience honed the activities even more. From Khasland and Landless identification to ensuring access to social safety net services, APROTIRODHO invigorated the inclusion of poor and marginalized landless farmers in mainstream economy. Under the project a total 1556 beneficiaries received entitlements on 1262.25 acres khasland and water bodies. The project is funded DFID/FCDO through Manuser Jonno Foundation (MJF).

Goal:

Reducing poverty and inequality by asserting the rights of the people living in Southwest Bangladesh who are marginalized and discriminated in terms of accessing and availing public resources and services.







## Project Area:

**20 Union Parishad  
of 4 upazilas of**

**Satkhira:** Debhata,  
Kaligonj and  
Assasuni Upazila

**Khulna:** Paikgacha  
Upazila



## Highlights:

- 320 PO and 24 Gono Unnyan Federation
- 8,000 HH being supported
- Since June, 2021, 1,306 landless families received 1453.59 acres of khasland. (Among them 169 landless families received 88.42 acres of khasland as permanent basis, 400 families received 206.83 acres of land as DCR, 737 families received 1158.34 acres of land as water bodies.
- Capacity building of 20 Union Parishad regarding land law and social safety net services.
- 1,505 HH received grant support for COVID-19 (BDT 10,750,000)
- 8,368 HH received and linked with the Government Safety net programme.
- 3 higher court, 29 lower court cases and 10 meditations were conducted. 589 people supported by higher court case, 54 people supported by lower court case and 45 people supported by mediations.

# Not Unequal Partners



Hitampur Women Fisherfolk Cooperatives Association: The first ever fisherfolk association formed by and comprised of only women. What comes to our mind when we think of fisherfolks? Most of us probably envision hardworking men rising at dawn to go fishing and wearily returning home in the evening to their wives. But the picture is quite different in Hitampur village of Paikgacha Upazila. The village has a huge community of fisherfolk where 23 families who are dependent on fish, shrimp and crab farming live side by side. And yes! The women of these families are fisherfolk too. Watching these women's perseverance and solidarity, Uttarar's Aprotiroddho Project's Manager Mahfuza Khatun suggested them to register for a fisherfolk association so that they can legally lease jalmahals and access their rights as authentic fisherfolks. Mahfuza took the responsibility of completing all kinds of paperwork and other prerequisites such as renting an office space, collecting required documents and running to and fro from one government office to another. The District Cooperative officer who was also a woman helped them as much as she could. Finally, by working together, these great women overcame all challenges and found the Hitampur Women Fisherfolk Association. Recently they have received for a 3-year lease of a 24.25 acres jalmahal and are attending trainings on sustainable fish farming. We are truly amazed at what women can accomplish when they support each other and appreciate these women's unity and dedication.

## ***"SALE- Sustainable Access to Land Equality"***

Uttaran's SALE was a milestone in a sense of how our work over the years was not just limited to the landless farmers of the South West coast of Bangladesh but rather an ideal model that should be spreaded all over Bangladesh. SALE was a true example of how NGOs, Civil society bodies can assist the Government to truly support the communities who are in need. The project promoted an effective, transparent and accountable land governance practices towards strengthening access to equitable land and property rights for all citizens. It is a model child and a new era into land property digitalization for the Government of Bangladesh, solving disputes permanently and ensuring participation of all stakeholders. The project also contributed towards achieving the vision of Digital Bangladesh. Through the project Uttaran assisted the Government of Bangladesh to conduct digital land record and survey in targeted upazilas, especially for women and vulnerable group. And also understood that, the project seek the better and inclusive way to establish the women's rights to land. 'SALE- Sustainable Access to Land Equality' was funded by European Union and DFID/FCDO provided a matching fund through ManusherJonno Foundation.

Aim: To facilitate process of better functioning of the modernized land management system for registration and ownership of land





**A landless family of three widow women with all their belongings**

## **Project Area:**

**28 Union Parishad of 3 upazilas**

**Rajshahi:** Mohonpur Upazila

**Barguna:** Amtoli Upazila

**Jamalpur:** Jamalpur Sadar Upazila

## **Highlights:**

Uttaran led this project with CARE UK and Manusher Jonno Foundation  
500 PO were formed  
15,000 HH received support  
identified 15,000 landless families and enlisted them into a database.  
2,496 women, 1270 widow, 3,840 extreme poor, 349 religious minority and 39 PWD have gotten legal legitimacy (registration/record) of their land  
Capacity building of 28 Union Parishad

# Uttaran

## Achievement at a glance

Sl. No	Activities	Achievements
1	Primary organization formed and activated	3,902 Primary Organizations formed
2	Number of households supported directly	96279 HH supported
3	DCR	6818.12 acres
4	Permanent settlement	3402.66 acres
5	Water bodies	7329.48 acres
6	Possession in khasland	1501.58 acres
7	Supported legal legitimacy of land	Supported for land registration/record to 7,994 people
8	Legal aid support through mediation	1,164 people supported by 688 mediations
9	Legal aid support through high court	3,203 people were supported by 61 high court cases
10	Legal aid support through lower court	1,796 people were supported by 680 lower court cases
11	IGA and grant support	491,426,400 (4,387,735 GBP) for 34,353 HH
12	Establishment and operate food banks	15 food banks supported 13,266 HH
13	Monetary value khasland those were accessed by landless families @.2,000,000 Taka x 19,051.84 acres of land	38,103,680,000 Taka (240,211,428 GBP) for 43487 HH
14	20699 people received and linked with the Government. Safety net programme.	20699 people received old age allowance, allowance for the widow, destitute and deserted women, allowance for financially insolvent disabled allowance etc. for 20699 people

Community Mobilization

Poverty Eradication

Environmental Justice

# Uttaran

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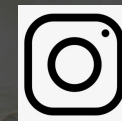
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