



OUR STORY OF TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE - GHORAGHAT AREA PROGRAMME

 **SECTOR**

Community Engagement and Sponsorship,
Health, Economic Empowerment and Education
October 2008 - September 2024

 **TIMEFRAME**

 **PEOPLE REACHED**

Population of 75,000 people including over
28,000 boys and girls.

 **LOCATION**

Ghoraghat, Ghoraghat Upazila, Northern
Bangladesh

 **GOAL**

Ensuring the sustained wellbeing of children,
families and communities.



Context

The Ghoraghat Area Programme (AP) was established in 2008 with the aim of alleviating poverty and improving the wellbeing of children and families in vulnerable communities. Over the last 15 years, the programme has targeted children and families living below the poverty line, serving a predominantly rural population of approximately 75,000 residents.

The area once faced severe social challenges, including child abuse, extreme deprivation, ethnic discrimination, malnutrition, and high school dropout rates, particularly among ethnic minority children and adolescent girls. These vulnerabilities were further exacerbated by inadequate healthcare services, limited economic opportunities, and

insufficient government support for marginalised groups. Compounding these issues, the 2007-2008 drought led to a significant food deficit, as agriculture was the primary source of income for households (68.64% in 2007), leading to widespread child malnutrition.

In response to these needs, the AP identified four strategic objectives:

- 1 Ensuring child protection
- 2 Enhancing maternal and child health
- 3 Building community resilience
- 4 Improving access to quality education

Community engagement and child protection

The Community Engagement and Sponsorship project has equipped local communities to take ownership of child protection efforts. By focusing on village development committees (VDCs), child forums, religious leaders and collaborating with local stakeholders, the AP has fostered a sense of ownership and long-term sustainability, while maintaining a child wellbeing focus. Participatory methods were employed, involving children, parents, government officials, and community-based organisations (CBOs) to identify local needs and co-create solutions for child protection, gender equality and disaster risk management¹.

This has resulted in notable improvements in child protection and community resilience. As a result, community wellbeing has improved, and can be seen through:

The significant increase in children's participation in clubs from 5.68% in 2013 to 51.3% in 2024 and greater involvement of children and young people in community decision making from 12.2% to 54.30% over the same period. There was also a rise in the proportion of youth (12-18 years) who feel that their community is safe place as this increased from 56% to 75.70%².



Coupled with increased awareness of child protection issues, these initiatives have created lasting change, benefiting a total of 19,881 people (children, parents, caregivers, CBO leaders, VDC leaders).

Through workshops and relevant training, community members have gained essential knowledge and confidence to defend children's rights and hold the local government accountable. Children in Ghoraghat now feel safer, happier, and more hopeful for the future. With a community that champions their rights, they are actively participating in decisions that affect their lives.

¹ World Vision approaches used: Systems approach to child protection: <https://www.wvi.org/child-protection/publication/systems-approach-child-protection>; Gender Equality and social inclusion: <https://www.wvi.org/our-work/gender-equality-social-inclusion>

² Over the same time period of 2013 to 2024.

³ World Vision approaches used: Timed and targeted counselling <https://www.wvi.org/health/timed-and-targeted-counseling-ttc>, Positive Deviance /Hearth <https://www.wvi.org/nutrition/positive-deviancehearth>

River of Life drawing

River of Life drawings were created by the children of Ghoraghat AP to see the positive changes of the programme, through their eyes. This vibrant timeline displays their proudest achievements.

Health & Nutrition

Children's health and nutritional status improved through better healthcare access, exclusive breastfeeding and by promoting good local nutrition practices³. There is now also improved access to clean water and sanitation through community-led efforts, particularly critical during the Covid pandemic.

Prior to World Vision's support, nearly half of Ghoraghat's under-fives were malnourished. Access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and nutritious food have contributed to better health outcomes. Mothers are now educated on nutrition during pregnancy and beyond. Families are more resilient, able to grow nutritious food year-round, improving their livelihoods to support their health.



The proportion of children receiving minimum dietary diversity improved from 35.71% to 79.4% (Baseline 2018, End Evaluation 2024) and chronic malnutrition (stunting) in children under five years of age decreased from 47.4% to 21.7% over the same period.



ABOVE: Drawn by Farjana, 15 and Sanjida, 11. This extract illustrates the progress made in education and child protection through the AP's efforts. ©2024 World Vision

BELOW: "We are very happy to have enough safe water in our community now" says Merry, 13 (left). ©2024 World Vision



Livelihoods

Economic development and livelihoods training have been critical in improving the financial stability of vulnerable families in Ghoraghat. The AP has focused on working with smallholder farmers and marginalised families by introducing sustainable farming practices, livestock rearing, and income-generating activities⁴.

As a result, the economic impact of the programme has been profound. By introducing modern farming techniques in 2018, the programme has increased household incomes by 14%. 157 families (14 with disabled family members) have received training in income-generating activities, resulting in increased savings and improved food security.

The livelihoods initiatives have significantly boosted farmer productivity. Consequently, many more families can adequately provide for their children and more households have developed savings habits, saving an average of around £40 per year.

Today, families like Nishita's can afford to support their children's education. Women's increased participation in economic activities has also resulted in positive, sustainable change. Fifteen-year-old Nishita's family is a testament to this transformation.

When her mother joined the programme, Nishita's family's circumstances improved drastically. Previously, her father – a day labourer – struggled to meet their basic needs, and her brother had been separated from the family due to early marriage. But the programme changed everything. By gaining valuable skills in income generation and animal husbandry, Nishita's mother began rearing cows, allowing her father to start a small butcher business. Today, Nishita's family have enough food, and her parents can prioritise her education, offering her a brighter future and protecting her rights.

BELOW: "My parents now believe in a better life for me... they support my education, and I dream of becoming a nurse to help my community" says Nishita, 15, (right) smiling with her mother as they both hold their bowls of crops. ©2023 World Vision

RIGHT: Reham, 15, (left) says, "We feel safe and cared for in school now, learning, growing and working towards achieving our goals". ©2024 World Vision



Over 85% of households are now able to provide well for their children, a significant increase from 29% at the start of the programme.



Education

The AP has worked hard to address barriers to education, enhance the quality of schooling, and reduce dropout rates. Our approaches have addressed literacy, early childhood care and development and the improvement of the school infrastructure.

World Vision Bangladesh's educational interventions have contributed to reduced school dropout rates, increased enrolment, and improved school infrastructure. School enrolment and completion rates have been consistently rising, showing a sustainable trend resulting in more students transitioning into secondary education. By providing essential school supplies, training teachers, and establishing early childhood development centres, the programme has helped reduce barriers to education.

In 2008, only 22% of children completed primary and secondary school. Today, school enrolment rates have risen for children aged 6-18. Primary school completion rates are now 92.5% and secondary school 88.9%⁵.



Access to formal education for disabled children also increased by 22% by 2024. Community and governmental support, coupled with better infrastructure, has fostered an environment where children feel safe and motivated to learn.

Conclusion

The Ghoraghat AP has made significant strides in all key areas, empowering local communities, enhancing child protection, improving health, fostering economic resilience, and expanding educational opportunities. Through strong community ownership, the programme has laid the groundwork for lasting change, ensuring the wellbeing of both children and families. Local leaders, caregivers, and children have been integral in creating sustainable and relevant solutions that support a secure environment in which children can thrive. As the programme transitions, we are proud to see Ghoraghat's communities equipped for generational change, with children like Nishita dreaming of brighter futures. We are confident that the positive impacts will endure beyond 2024, strengthening the community's ability to protect children and face future challenges.

⁴ Livelihoods approaches used: Ultra poor graduation model, Savings for transformation and Local Value Chain Development can be found here: <https://www.wvi.org/livelihoods/livelihoods-technical-library>.

⁵ Analysis revealed the completion rate of 6-11 years primary school children increased from 22% in 2013 to 92.5% at the end program evaluation 2024. The completion rate for 12-16 years secondary education increased from 22% to 88.9% over the same period.



Learning and recommendations

Covid posed a major challenge, threatening the AP's achievements and hampering further positive impact. For example, child marriage rates did not show a significant reduction during the final programme evaluation survey, due to increased vulnerabilities when children were out of school. In response, the AP worked with communities to raise awareness about the harmful effects of early marriage and the importance of education.

The final project evaluation identified several key areas of focus necessary to sustain the achieved results and continue building on the momentum gained during the past few years. These are for the attention of the local community and World Vision in the new Chapainawabganj Area Programme, selected due to issues such as high levels of deprivation, child labour, early marriage, and low school attendance.

It is essential to continuously expand access to early-years education facilities, which ensure children are ready for primary school. In addition, life-skills based education provision needs to provide stronger, relevant life-skills to adolescents, such as self-care and decision making. Local

groups have the necessary capacity to continue this work in partnership with the government education department.

To maintain sustainable livelihood opportunities for farmers, it is essential to continue establishing markets for organic produce, including bigger markets in Dhaka. Village and producer groups need to collaborate with the government on implementation of a marketing policy and integrated farm management practices.

Raising awareness on the grave consequences of child marriage, poor maternal and infant health, and violence against women is crucial, especially in remote areas to maintaining the progress made by this programme. Groups have sufficient capacity to carry out these awareness-raising activities.

Gaining government registration as legal entities will enable Village Development Committees to increase their influence in the communities and continue developing prioritised areas sustainably. This will also provide the potential to grow into established Community-Based Organisations.

ABOVE: "We love reading books in our classroom." Ohona, aged 12, (left). ©2023 World Vision

World Vision UK

World Vision House, Opal Drive, Fox Milne, Milton Keynes, MK15 0ZR
tel: +44 (0) 1908 84 10 00 fax: +44 (0) 1908 84 10 01 email: info@worldvision.org.uk

worldvision.org.uk Follow us: @WorldVisionUK      

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COVER PHOTO: Dipa, 16, with one of her family's cows, part of the successful livestock business you helped her parents establish. ©2023 World Vision

