

# ActionAid Bangladesh at 25

## Striving towards Dignity

**A**ctionAid Bangladesh (AAB) is an international development organization working to establish a world without poverty and injustice. The right to a life with dignity and equity for all determine the nature and characteristics of ActionAid Bangladesh's plans, programmes and engagements.

AAB emphasizes on an inclusive society comprising of the poor, marginalized, excluded, women, children, indigenous community people, people with disability, and HIV/AIDS in its reach as a development partner. AAB works to find simple solutions to mammoth problems with individuals and communities with the intent to usher in change, transformation at micro and macro level in attitude, systems, procedure, policy and legislation pursuing rights based approach. AAB partners with community, people and social movements, NGOs, academia, media and government.

From a humble beginning in *Char Fasson* of Bhola, as an organization called 'For those who have less' a charity with funding from the members of UK charities for ActionAid, we transformed ourselves into ActionAid Bangladesh. With Child Sponsorship funding, we had set up our first long term development programme known as DA or Development Area in Bhola in 1983. Within twenty five years we had a total of 37 DAs and now have 31 operational DAs, and more than 120 partners in Bangladesh.

As ActionAid Bangladesh started to work with the poor and marginalized communities it became clearer that their development should be led by their ideas and initiatives. Poor and marginalized people need to take charge of their dreams and realize it; we are there to assist in the process of transforming those dreams into realities. We have tried to walk with them and grow as they grow. As the relationship strengthened, we began to understand poverty better from their perspective and that what they wanted was 'justice not charity'. This has transformed our thinking and analysis of poverty. We began to recognize that systematic denial of rights is the main cause of poverty. Therefore, we have taken 'Rights Based Approach' as our main way of working.

In 2009, AAB celebrates 25 years in Bangladesh with renewed mandate to fight poverty, injustice and to uphold the innate worth of each individual to participate, decide and contribute.

*Farah Kabir, Country Director, ActionAid Bangladesh*

Rights Based Approach sounds very complicated but it's very simple. It begins with building awareness around rights, also building capacity for the person whose rights are being denied for them to be able to claim their rights, but also using that capacity which has been built in the person, for them to actually address the rights holder because the rights holder are often government, international institutions, civil society, market agencies, so this whole process of rights based approach is built around awareness, capacity building, provision of strategic services as part of capacity building, also building a bridge between poor people and those agencies like government that are upholding their rights.

Our vision of 'a world without poverty and injustice in which every person enjoys their right to a life with dignity' captures our mission to work with poor and excluded people, to eradicate poverty and injustice. Our values of *Mutual respect, Equity and justice, Honesty and transparency, Solidarity with the poor, powerless and excluded, Courage of conviction, Independence and Humility* are at the center of all that we do. Our principles of Accountability, Women's rights, Power, Learning and Transparency guide all of our work. These are the pillars that give us the strength to work against the insurmountable odds that perpetuate poverty. We believe ending poverty is a process that everyone needs to be part of and therefore, we believe in 'Ending Poverty Together'.

**In Bangladesh** we work in 45 districts, four sectors and 12 themes.

These twelve themes relate to; poor and excluded peoples' Livelihood promotion, Disaster preparedness, reducing risks and emergency response and their Access to natural resources and public services, Advancing women's rights, Creating adolescents opportunities, Stop violence against women and girls, Diversity and citizenship, Disability and enabling environment, Social inclusion, Quality education, Economic Justice and Right to quality health.

Our approaches of work are participation, empowerment, Reflect, working through partners, building networks and alliances, research, advocacy and innovation.

Over the last 25 years we and our partners have been able to transform the lives of the poor, especially women, provide better education to children and improve livelihoods of the poor and excluded. We have countless stories of change from the grassroots, successful mobilizations at the grassroots and stories of policy influences.

Many of the children from the schools we supported in their early years, are now well established in society. To quote one of them

*... I remember my teachers, especially Rob sir, Miraj sir and Zinat Ama still to this day. I cherish my school experience because of their care and concern.*

*Barrister Abdul Wadud  
Bangladesh Supreme Court*

Saleha Begum from *Char Montaz* in Galachipa is an education activist. With her meager resources, she started a school when there was none in one of the remotest *chars* of Bangladesh. As a woman, she faced all possible obstacles that a society could throw. But persistent that she continued with her work. We have assisted her through our partner SAP-Bangladesh to build a school in *Char Montaz*. This school is a registered non-government primary school now.



Saleha says, "With the disaster risk reduction through schools programme of ActionAid Bangladesh, the people of Char Bangla have learned how to prepare against disasters like cyclone SIDR. We all would have died if ActionAid Bangladesh did not build a school cum cyclone shelter in Char Bangla."



We had been a key player in supporting the Government of Bangladesh towards its efforts around the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD). Through our partner NFWOD (National Forum of Organizations Working for the Disabled), we actively supported various policies and processes to expedite the ratification of UNCRPD by Bangladesh. Because of our relentless advocacy with the GoB, it has appointed 46 focal points across all ministries and directorates. After ratification, GoB has formed a monitoring committee for implementation of UNCRPD.

We started the Happy Home Project in late 2006 for the adolescent girls living on streets. It provided a unique opportunity for street children to acquire basic education and health support. Some 150 girls are now skilled and resourceful through various trainings. Majority of them are now been able to make handicrafts products while the others are engaged in different jobs. They are now earning and living a dignified life.



We have supported Participatory Budget Analysis in some Union Parishads (UP) which created opportunities for the citizens to raise their concerns, to engage in the process and to articulate their thoughts during the UP budget preparation process. We have been able to influence the UP members to incorporate these concerns within the budgets and make it more pro-poor. The budget has been made public through bill boards as well. It has also given the UP members ample scope to clarify how much money is allocated to them. It has also helped to remove the mistrust existing between the UP members and the people. This has also led to greater ownership of the UP activities.

Women members of one of our Lokokendra in Kushtia Sadar upazilla have been able to advocate for their right to Khas land. They had successfully advocated with the Pourashava to give them the 'holding numbers' so that they can have legal ownership to the house built on Khas land. They have also been able to convince the Pourashava to provide with clean water, to build a water reservoir for the community and to supply electricity.

We have assisted women like Saleha who is physically challenged. She lives in the *Charland* of Faridpur. As a Reflect graduate she learned to read and write and began to explore her options for a better life. She received assistance from Lokokendra (People organization which is developed out of Reflect circle) and from the department of livestock for goat rearing. Now she owns 10 goats, 3 cows and also is the co-owner of a tractor. Now she lives in her own tin-shed house.

We have been involved in extensive advocacy with the government to implement the Acid Control Act, 2002 in 3 districts. As a result, 'acid sellers' are applying for acid license. This experience has contributed towards 3 of our partners becoming active members of the District Acid Control committee.

ActionAid is the name of endless initiative towards improving the quality of lives of the marginal people through effective struggle against poverty, sensitizing on rights and gender. ActionAid is a faithful vehicle for the multi-faceted development initiatives of Sabalambu Unnayan Samity (SUS) and many other NGOs, as well as thousands of deprived people. We offer our love, respect and gratitude to all of the members of ActionAid at the eve of the celebration of 25 years.

**Begum Rokeya**  
Sabalambu Unnayan Samity (SUS)  
Netrakona



**Child Sponsorship** is ActionAid's main fundraising mechanism that bridges an individual (called 'sponsor') from a developed country with a poor or underprivileged child in a developing country. In Child Sponsorship fundraising, children act as ambassadors for their community. These children regularly send messages and portraits of their development to the sponsors who are mostly from Italy, UK, Greece, Spain and Sweden. Sponsors provide financial support to ActionAid for the development work. ActionAid has more than 18,000 sponsors and as many sponsored children in Bangladesh.



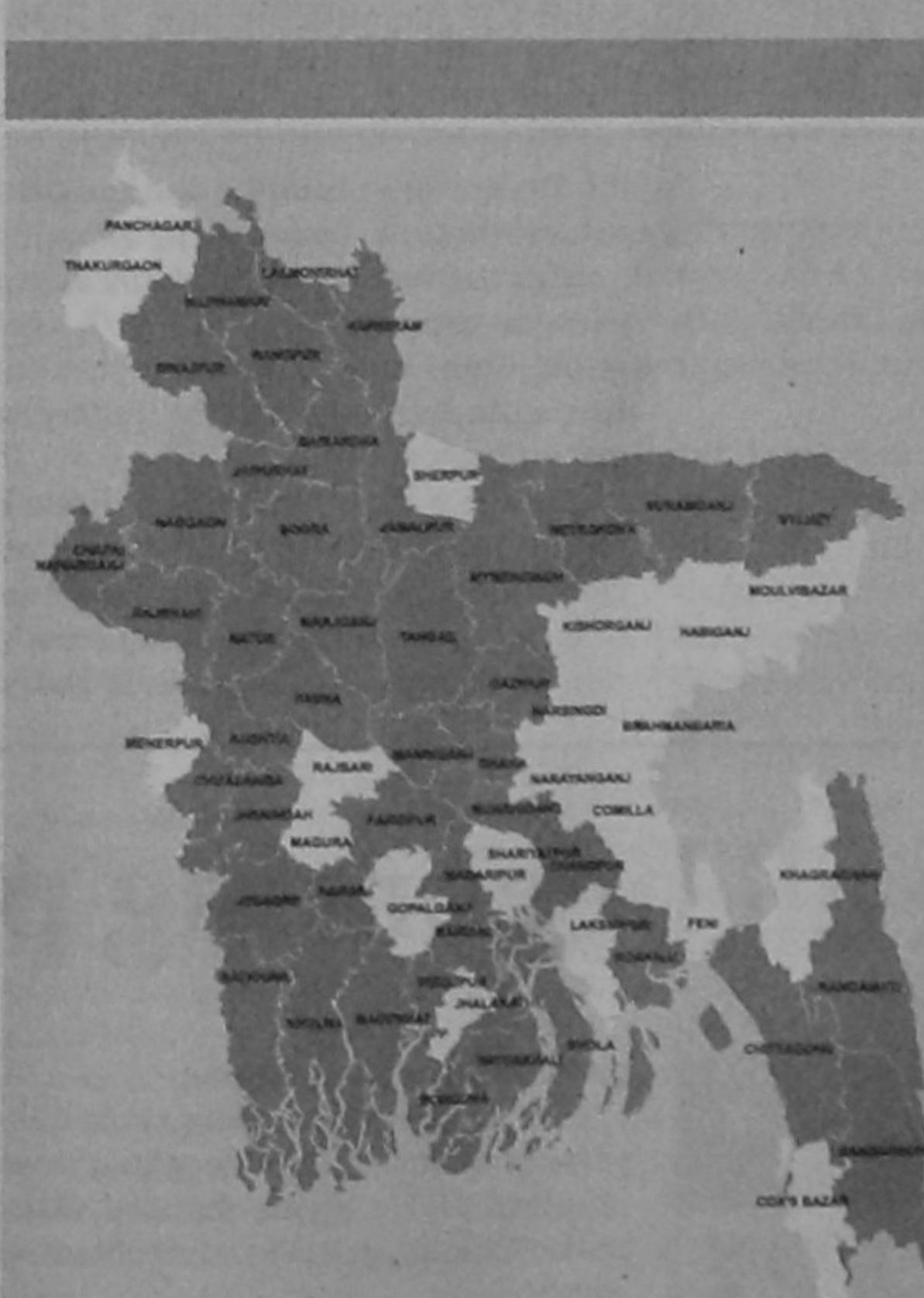
**Reflect**, an innovative approach for adult education, empowerment and social change was developed by ActionAid in 1993. From 1995-2005 with funding from DFID, ActionAid Bangladesh implemented Reflect project and following the end of funding it has continued to use Reflect in all its programmes. Lokokendras (Peoples' organization) have evolved from Reflect circles and they are working to develop the community as well as for initiating social change. ActionAid Bangladesh is now facilitating 87 Lokokendras all over Bangladesh. Reflect is now used by over 500 organizations in over 70 countries worldwide and the organizations working with Reflect won UNESCO literacy prizes in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2008.



ActionAid Bangladesh has a Poverty Research and Resource Centre. The centre supports its staff, friends and other contacts. It has more than 3500 books and reference materials on poverty and development. We like to share our resource and experience with others.

*... I highly appreciate ActionAid Bangladesh for their pragmatic approach to work through several local development partners to reach out to the larger number of marginalized, neglected and deprived people of our society.*

**Monsur Ahmed Choudhury**  
MD, Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation and Vice chair for Asia Region of the UNCRPD Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities



*We have the privilege and honor to walk with so many people that it is impossible to list all of them in a page. They all are our well-wishers and fellow travelers in our collective fight to End Poverty.*

**actionaid**