



# The Forgotten Smile

[Stories of Courage and Resilience]

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## Foreword

Christian Aid has been working in Bangladesh since 1972 at the forefront of the fight against poverty.

Our work focuses primarily on climate change, disaster risk reduction, pro-poor market access, gender equality and human rights issues.

Our programme promotes access to justice, equitable resources and thriving livelihoods for marginalized people and communities.

"The Forgotten Smile" is an effort to bring our programme to life with some of the stories from the people we have worked with.

We would like to thank the project participants for their tremendous support in this journey to share a collective goal through apprehending a benchmark for Christian Aid Bangladesh programme.



Shakeb Nabi  
Country Director

## CHRISTIAN AID IN BANGLADESH

Christian Aid is an international organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life free from poverty. We work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. We are part of a wider movement for social justice.

In Bangladesh Christian Aid has been active since 1972. We are recognised for our work on climate change, disaster risk management, gender equality and human rights issues. Our programme promotes access to just and equitable resources and supports the creation of resilient and thriving livelihoods for marginalised people and communities. Working alongside our partners, we are committed to making government institutions more accountable to communities.

We have significant experience of working with government and civil society organisations in Bangladesh. Our programme is closely aligned with the vision and goals of donor organisations. We work with 16 partners in 25 of the most vulnerable districts of Bangladesh across the south coastal region, north-west and central flood and *haor* (wetland) areas. We have long-standing relationships with local organisations based on mutual learning and experiences.

## OUR NEW STRATEGY

In 2013, Christian Aid Bangladesh launched its new programme strategy which is closely aligned with the global goals laid out in Partnership for Change. Equality for socially and economically marginalised communities, empowering them to know their rights, building their capabilities to negotiate with governing institutions, and ensuring their access to markets so they can enjoy a fair share of wealth and make the most of economic opportunities. We will work towards deep and lasting change in socially and economically excluded communities, with a strong focus on women from fishing, dalit and ethnic-minority communities and on single women in highly climate- vulnerable areas of Bangladesh. Our overriding goal is to ensure these communities participate fully in vital decisions that shape their lives, thrive in building their resources and capacity to respond successfully to opportunities and the risks they face, and ultimately lift themselves out of poverty. We will develop strategic partnerships with a greater emphasis on participation, innovation and learning, scalability and mutual accountability, with Christian Aid Bangladesh increasingly playing a facilitative and collaborative role.

To bring real change through our work in Bangladesh, we are aiming for three integrated and mutually reinforcing outcomes:

- Resilient livelihoods – We will integrate our existing work in secure livelihoods and economic justice with climate change adaptation, disaster risk management, and emergency response and pro- poor market access projects. Our work on resilient livelihoods will contribute to building thriving communities with greater income, food security and a better ability to respond to extreme climate uncertainties, natural disasters and emergencies – ensuring we work within humanitarian principles, Sphere standards and Human Accountability Partnership (HAP) standards.

- Accountable institutions – Our work around accountable governance will be boosted by our learning from power analysis. We will promote civic space and effective dialogue between power holders and excluded communities, amplifying the voices of powerless groups and building the accountability of local and national institutions in their decision making.
- Equal rights for all – Essential to all aspects of our work, we have named equal rights as a crosscutting objective to ensure gender and power analysis are central to everything we do. The key outcome will be that broader civil society successfully influences government policies and practices on inequality issues, especially access to basic services, economic opportunities and emergency response.

### **FORGING NEW PARTNERSHIPS**

Christian Aid is looking to forge strategic partnerships with organisations with which we share a common purpose. Partnerships with communities, civil society, government and the private sector will be formed in the spirit of working together in a movement for change and to seek large-scale and innovative solutions to poverty. We have a programmatic, results-based approach to participation, empowerment and policy advocacy at local, national and global levels, working with our partners and through alliances, networks and consortia.

### **OUR OBJECTIVES**

- To empower excluded communities to claim their rights, entitlements and expand their power in social and economic spaces.
- To facilitate an enabling space for community-based organisations, CSOs, the private sector and the state to develop pro-poor policies and institutions that lead to large scale, innovative solutions to poverty.
- To support national level policy and advocacy work for socially just policies where they are needed, and ensure the effective implementation of those already in place.

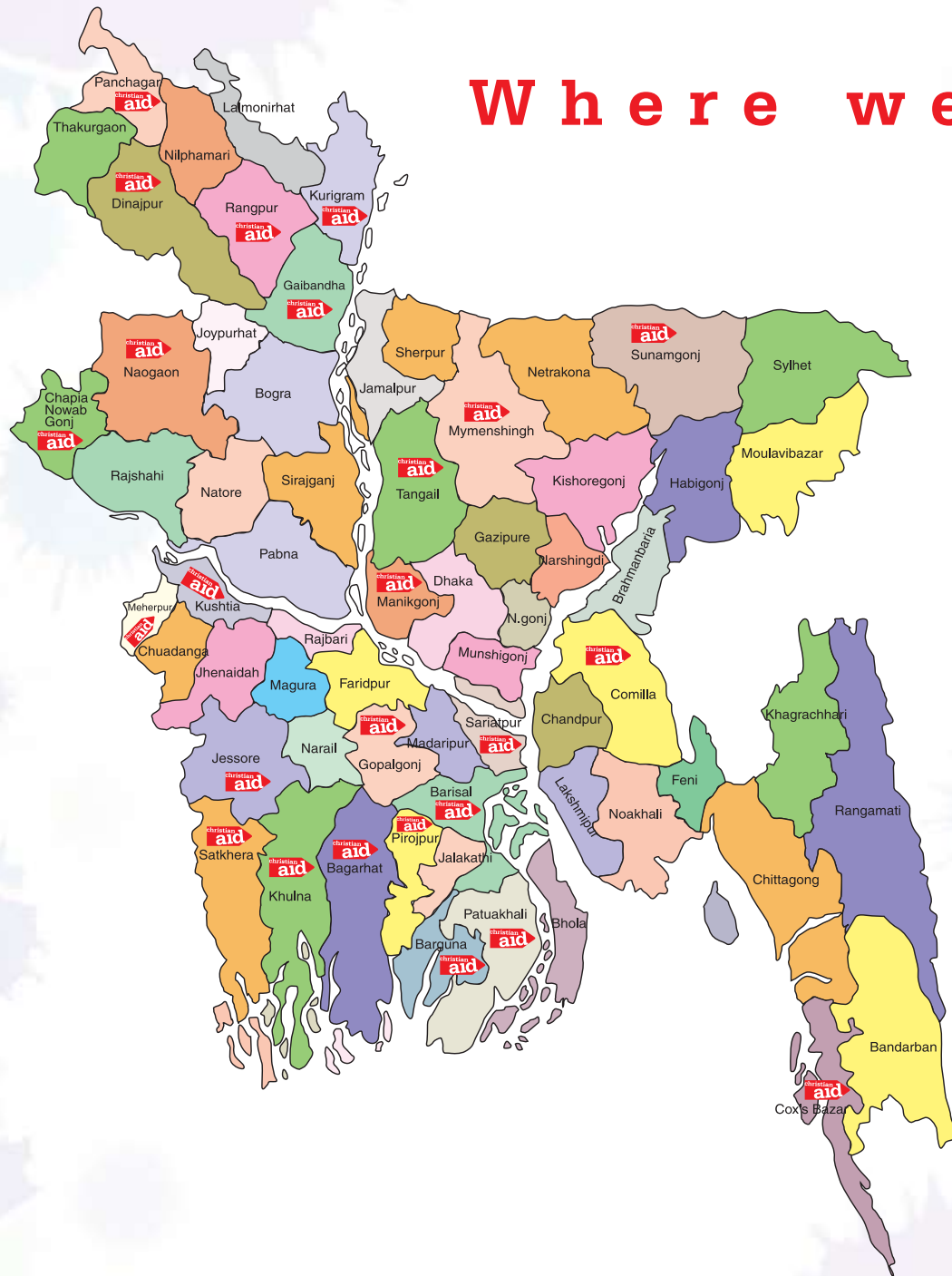
### **OUR RESOURCE SHARING PARTNERS**

In Bangladesh, Christian Aid is funded by DFID, the European Commission, the Scottish Government and START Network.

### **Geographical Coverage**

Comilla, Kushtia, Naogan, Tangail, Barisal, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Chapainawabganj, Jessore, Khulna, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Gopalganj, Manikganj, Meherpur, Pirojpur, Bagerhat, Sathkhira, Barguna, Patuakhali, Shariatpur, Sunamgonj, Panchagar, Cox's Bazar, Mymensingh.

# Where we work



Tackling poverty in Bangladesh is becoming increasingly difficult due to the impacts of climate change. Many people live in low-lying areas and are vulnerable to heavy rain, floods, cyclones and drought. Natural disasters are invariably accompanied by a heavy loss of life and property and can push vulnerable communities further into poverty.



A cool breeze was rustling through the grass that dawn. Shibani Mondol enthusiastically showed me her field which was filled with golden paddy, which keeps her smiling.







Rivers are the lifeblood for many in Bangladesh, offering hope and improved livelihoods.



'It was the most petrified memory of my life. Even now my family and I have to bear its consequences. Cyclone Aila snatched all my hope and ability to exist as it shattered my house and property. I am still residing on the flood protection dam with my husband and two children. My sheep give me the courage to survive which has been possible only with the support of Christian Aid Bangladesh.'

Shondha Bain



'Each morning I wake up with the clucks of my hens. I was able to build up my poultry farm with the support of Christian Aid Bangladesh which gave me a hope to stand strong despite my poverty. It allowed me to make a handsome amount of savings.'

Angela Biswas

'Crab rearing opened a huge opportunity for profitable work. Due to the low monetary and time investment needed, I usually have more than 50% profit monthly through my work.'

Preetilota Mondal



Crab rearing is widespread in Bangladesh and is a popular adaptive livelihood choice among people in the coastal areas.





'It's only BDT 300 for you.'  
Mosammat Meherun barter with her customer to sell cloth. Following an abusive marriage, Mosammat attempted suicide. She has now turned her life around and makes an income thanks to increased market access.



‘This is one of the biggest arums in my garden. It tastes really good.’ Smriti Rani Dhali and her family eat the vegetables she grows in her homestead garden; she sells the surplus at the market.

Fulmala Adikari is a well-known figure in her local area. She has established a profitable small-scale milk marketing business – a wonderful role model for other women in her area.





A sunny day always bring smiles to the faces of local fishermen. They set out with their net, humming a song as they work.



Women from the Pipulia spice producer group pack chilli and turmeric powder which they grew on their land.



'It is always challenging to be the initiator of any new work. I was the first one to make a business out of vermicomposting while others were hesitant to do it. But after seeing my success, other women were encouraged to produce it and enhance their income.'

Fayra Begem





In the garden adjacent to the tin shade house, a women in a bright red-yellow sari nurtures her vegetables. Champa Mazumder is growing vegetables in her field commercially and making a remarkable profit. In the recent season, she earned more than 50% of her investment from these vegetables.

'Days passed easily before, but Cyclone Aila changed everything. I lost everything. It was completely impossible for me to buy a boat and fishing net. Finally, thanks to the support of Christian Aid Bangladesh, each morning I can set out on my fishing trip.'

Prokash Rai



Mr Azad Molla tells me: 'My son makes friends with my seven cows and he loves to play with them.' It was hard for Azad Molla to support his family, but now he hopes to build a dairy farm of his own after he was selected as a beneficiary of Christian Aid Bangladesh's Inclusive Economic Development Project.





A group of women proudly welcomed us into the Udaypur Dairy. Here they make different products including cream, candy, butter and ghee from cow's milk, which they supply to local sweet factories, schools and for ceremonies.

Rita Shen sets a positive example for women in her village through her tailoring business, homestead garden, poultry and cow rearing.





'I lived in such difficulties that there were times when I questioned why we bothered to survive. But the tea stall changed my life, and brings a smile to my face.'

Moina Biswas





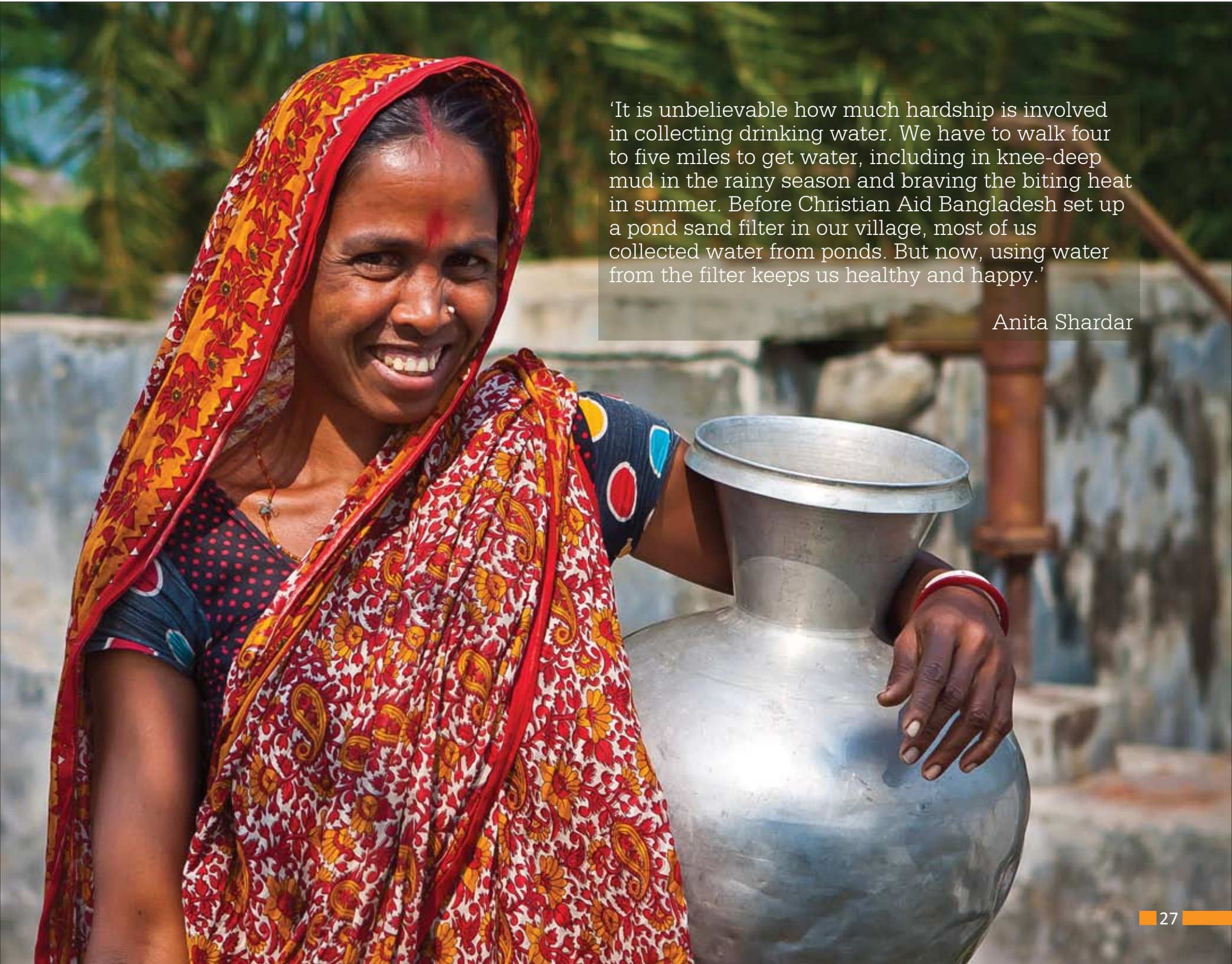
Adolescent girls, students and married women are busy weaving wicker stools (mora) to fulfil an order. They are keen to extend their product range to meet market demands.



'When people are happy eating my delicious food, this is the happiest moment for me.' Monoroma Baroi and her husband Nonikanto Baroi open their small shop every day at dawn, and serve snacks and tea.

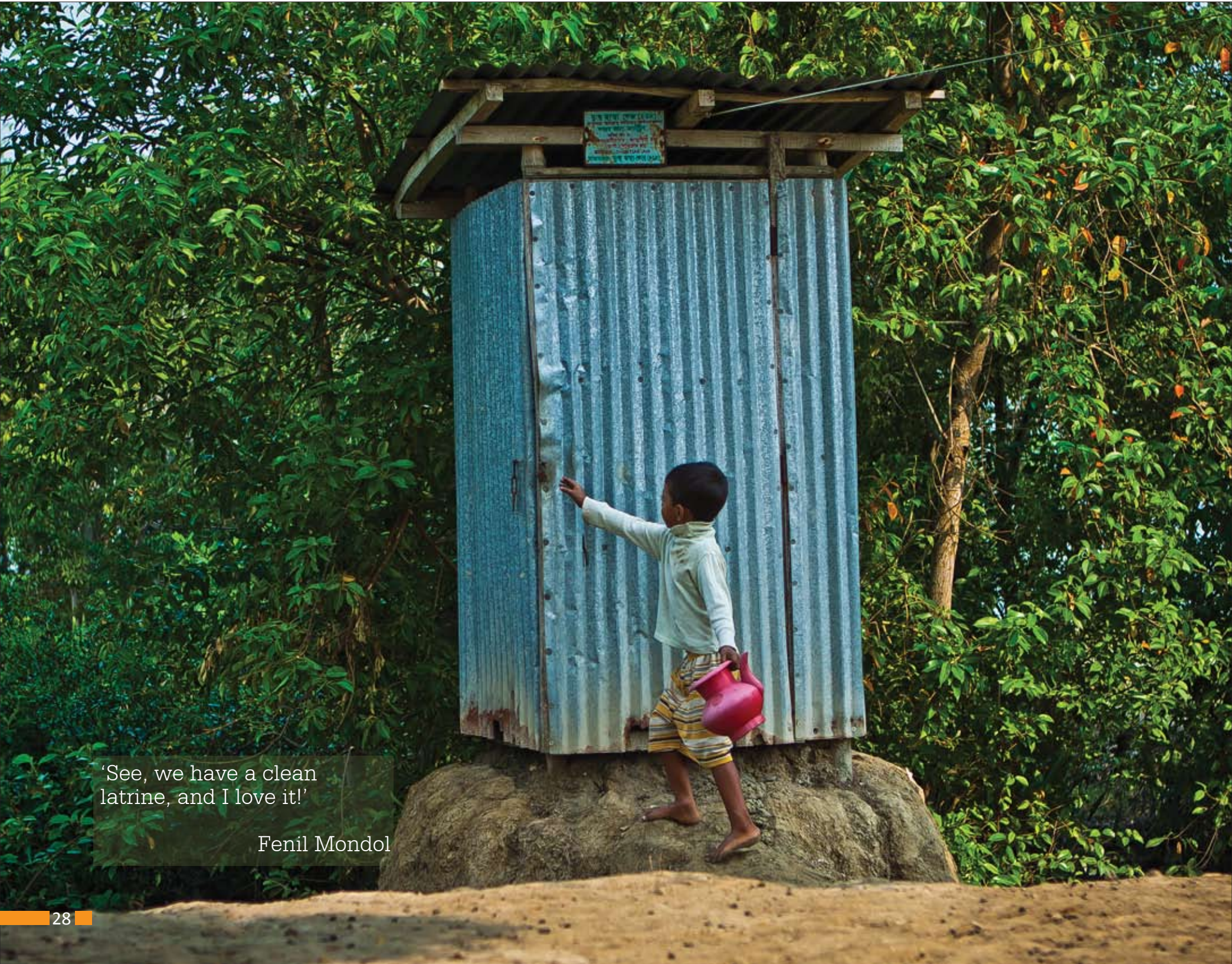
Bangladesh's courageous farmers don't give up hope. Against the odds, they continue to plant and harvest their paddy seedlings.






'It is unbelievable how much hardship is involved in collecting drinking water. We have to walk four to five miles to get water, including in knee-deep mud in the rainy season and braving the biting heat in summer. Before Christian Aid Bangladesh set up a pond sand filter in our village, most of us collected water from ponds. But now, using water from the filter keeps us healthy and happy.'

Anita Shardar



'See, we have a clean latrine, and I love it!'

Fenil Mondol



'This is the seventh time I moved since my marriage. Nearly every year the monsoon flood causes riverbank erosion. Thank you to Christian Aid Bangladesh for supporting us during natural disasters which reduces our grief.'

Shohorbanu Begum

From the crack of dawn, a wide range of people use the roads: women carrying drinking water, old men transporting large sacks of ripe paddy, children going to school. Christian Aid Bangladesh has helped to deliver infrastructure such as roads, to help communities recover from disasters and ensure that people can do what they need to do.





'I heard a sound and looked around but couldn't find my little eight-month-old daughter who had been playing on the bed. Hearing my scream, my husband came and got her out from flood water that filled our room.'

China Begem





The sound of a boat engine brings hope to inhabitants in the char areas of Gaibandha. Since those chars are in remote areas, a boat is a vital means of transport for work and medical attention in emergencies.



Christian Aid Bangladesh usually responds quickly after any disaster through support to their beneficiaries and non beneficiaries throughout the project areas. They accentuate on immediate food assistance which is important in the initial period of any sort of disaster.



Local communities wait for food and other assistance after a long period without access to sustenance.




It's the end of the school day, and children at Ujan Tora Government Primary School enjoy playing on new raised ground areas, where it was impossible to play before.



Members of Basundhora Forum proudly show the gold medal they received as the Best Women's Cooperative Organisation in Gopalganj in the 2011 National Cooperative Awards. Forum president Sebadashi Biswas said, 'Even many multimillionaires don't get this award.'

Aklima Begum talks to schoolgirl Jesmin and her mother about the impacts of early marriage. Since her engagement with the Union of Grassroots Women's Leader Network, Aklima has been an advocate for women and has been recognised with the Joyeeta Award for her extraordinary contribution to social activities.





Each morning women gather in a small bamboo-thatched room to make palm leaf crosses for export to the UK. The hand-made products provide many women with new skills and a small income.





Kamarkhola and Shutarkhali Mohila Unnayan Shongathan is a united effort to bring about social changes at Dacope.

Participants at a regional consultation on pro-poor market development and inclusive growth, 2014







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