



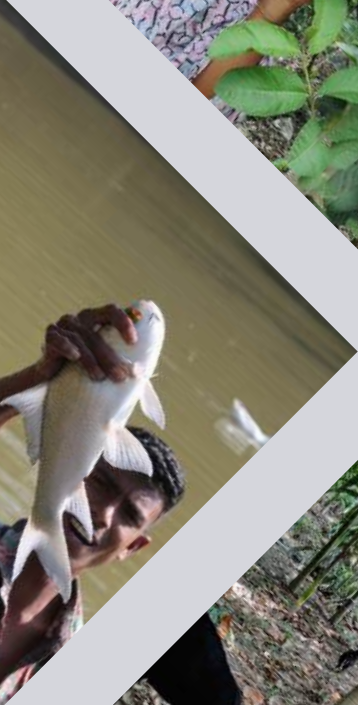
# Mid-Term Impact Assessment of RELI Project 2024

Abul Barkat  
Asmar Osman  
Faisal M Ahamed  
Mohammad Shafiqul Islam

  
Human Development  
Research Centre

[www.hdrc-bd.com](http://www.hdrc-bd.com)

Dhaka:  
December  
2024



নগরপুত্রাম সমিতি  
স্থাপিত-২০২২ইং  
নওগাঁ সদর, নওগাঁ।



# Mid-Term Impact Assessment of RELI Project

Submitted to



## Social Development Foundation

22/22, Khilji Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka 1207, Bangladesh

Submitted by

Abul Barkat<sup>1</sup>

Asmar Osman<sup>2</sup>

Faisal M Ahamed<sup>3</sup>

Mohammad Shafiqul Islam<sup>4</sup>



## Human Development Research Centre

humane development through research and action

Dhaka: 03 December 2024

<sup>1</sup> Abul Barkat, Team Leader of the Assessment and Chief Advisor, HDRC

<sup>2</sup> Asmar Osman, Social Development Specialist and Research Consultant, HDRC

<sup>3</sup> Faisal M Ahamed, Statistician and Director of Research, HDRC

<sup>4</sup> Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, Livelihood Specialist and Research Consultant, HDRC

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Social Development Foundation (SDF), as its continuous development endeavours, initiated a 5-year long extensive “Resilience, Entrepreneurship, and Livelihood Improvement (RELI)” in October 2021 with the Project Development Objective to improve the livelihoods, enhance resilience, and support rural entrepreneurship for the poor and extreme poor in the project areas. In September 2024, the RELI completed its first 3 years. During this time period, a respectable number of the poor and extreme poor have successfully accessed the Revolving Fund, a core component of the project, and invested in different potential income-generating activities (IGAs). Unemployed youths are utilizing skill development funds and increasing their income through wage employment and self-employment. Many vulnerable villagers who received a ‘One Time Grant’ have also experienced livelihood development and enhanced resilience. In the mid of the project, the time is favourable for assessing the project interventions’ impacts on the improvement of income, resilience, empowerment of the extreme poor and poor, including youth and vulnerable, women empowerment, raising awareness on nutrition and assessing effectiveness of project processes and functioning of institutions created by the project.

Looking from the above perspective, SDF entrusted the Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) to perform the herculean task of a Mid-term Impact Assessment for RELI. This is deemed essential to assess project performance by comparing midline outcomes to baseline situations. This study is crucial to SDF, as the data will be used to compare with the mid- and end-of-term data and for internal progress monitoring.

We are grateful to SDF for entrusting HDRC to carry out this critical assignment; in this regard, we express our sincere gratitude to the Chairperson of SDF, Dr. Muhammad Abdul Mazid.

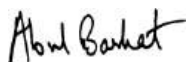
We are indebted to Mr. Md. Mahbubul Alam, FCMA —the Acting Managing Director of SDF—for his enthusiasm and proactive-positive participation in all the stages of this assignment. His responsible decisions at various critical phases have expedited the study process.

We are particularly thankful to Mr Lutfor Rahman— Director, ME&L, SDF— for his unstinted support, communication, and guidance during all the stages of the Mid-term assessment. We are also thankful to the RELI experts and officials at SDF-HQ for their input and support in preparing the report.

Two months of training and field data collection were complex. We thank RELI's Regional Directors (RD) and District Managers (DM) for their cooperation during the fieldwork. Also, without plentiful cooperation from the Cluster Officers and Cluster Facilitators of the RELI, the data and information collection would have been difficult; we convey our best regards to them all.

Our field team was committed and trained enough to overcome all the odds amidst field realities and complete their tasks successfully. We are grateful to them for the commendable work done with the utmost sincerity in ensuring quality.

The in-house staff members of HDRC worked untiringly at all stages. Above all, we will remain grateful to the respondents and participants in the survey, without whose profound support the implementation of the field survey would not have been possible.



Prof. Abul Barkat, *PhD*

Dhaka: 03 December 2024

## ACRONYMS

ANC	Antenatal Care
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BD	Bangladesh
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka (Currency)
BMI	Body Mass Index
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CERC	Contingent Emergency Response Component
CNG	Compressed Natural Gas (used for vehicles and transport)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPO	Farmer Producer Organization
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
GS	Gram Samiti
HDRC	Human Development Research Centre
HH	Household
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
HYV	High-Yield Variety (of seeds or crops)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDA	International Development Association
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IGA	Income Generating Activities
KII	Key Informant Interview
LSP	Local Service Provider
MFI	Microfinance Institution
NFPO	Not-For-Profit Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NJLIP	Nuton Jibon Livelihood Improvement Project
PDI	Project Development Indicator(s)
PDO	Project Development Objective(s)
PNC	Postnatal Care
PP	Percentage-Points
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
RCI	Resilience Capacity Index
RCCSs	RELI Cluster Community Societies
RDCSs	RELI District Community Societies
RELI	Resilience, Entrepreneurship, and Livelihood Improvement
RIMA-II	Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis-II
RMG	Ready-Made Garments
SDF	Social Development Foundation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SHG	Self-Help Group
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
USD	United States Dollar
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WB	World Bank

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

## ACRONYMS

## LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## SUMMARY OF KEY PDO INDICATORS

<b>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. RELI Project Overview.....	1
1.2. Mid-Term Impact Assessment Survey Context and Purpose.....	4
1.3. Mid-Term Impact Assessment Survey Objectives.....	4
1.4. Methodology .....	5
1.5. Organization and Utility of the Report.....	6
<b>CHAPTER II: PROJECT DEMOGRAPHICS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1. Household Profile .....	8
2.1.1. Household Size and Female-Male Distribution .....	8
2.1.2. Age Composition and Dependency Ratio .....	8
2.1.3. Literacy and Education .....	9
2.1.4. Household Socio-Economic Status.....	9
2.1.5. Remittances.....	9
2.2. Village Profile.....	10
2.2.1. Village Administrative Characteristics .....	10
2.2.2. Social and Human Development Facilities .....	10
2.2.3. Communication and Energy Infrastructure.....	11
2.2.4. Communication and Energy Infrastructure.....	11
<b>CHAPTER III: RELI PROJECT DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE (PDO) INDICATORS .....</b>	<b>12</b>
3.1. PDO Indicators.....	12
3.2. Income-Generating Activities (IGAs).....	12
3.3. Income Change .....	13
3.4. Beneficiary Income Change.....	15
3.5. Impacts on Producers and Rural Entrepreneurs .....	16
3.6. Poverty Change.....	17
3.7. Satisfaction of Beneficiaries .....	18
3.7.1. Satisfaction Index .....	18
3.7.2. Satisfaction Variables.....	19
3.8. Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (RIMA) .....	22
3.8.1. RIMA Analysis Method .....	22
3.8.2. RELI Components.....	23
3.8.3. RIMA Results.....	24
<b>CHAPTER IV: EARLY SIGNS OF PROJECT IMPACT .....</b>	<b>31</b>
4.1. Impacts on Household Beneficiaries.....	31
4.1.1. Household Employment.....	31
4.1.2. Household Asset .....	34
4.1.3. Youth Empowerment .....	37
4.1.4. Multi-dimensional Impact of Stipends on Students .....	41
4.1.5. Food and Nutrition.....	42
4.1.6. Healthcare .....	49
4.1.7. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).....	51
4.1.8. Housing and Electricity Access .....	54
4.2. Impacts on Community Beneficiaries.....	55

4.2.1	Decision Making.....	55
4.2.2	Rights Practices.....	57
4.2.3	Women's Asset Holding.....	59
4.2.4	Empowerment through Income and Leadership .....	60
4.2.5	Age of girl's marriage.....	61
4.2.6	Social Cohesion and Governance .....	62
4.3.	Impacts on Disaster Resilience .....	62
4.4.	Impact on Community Institutions and Livelihood Development.....	64
4.4.1.	Savings.....	64
4.4.2.	Credit Access .....	67
4.4.3.	Impact of One Time Grant among Vulnerable Groups.....	71
4.5.	Impact on Business Development and Institutional Strengthening .....	72
4.5.1.	Entrepreneurship Development.....	72
<b>CHAPTER V: ASSESSING SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES OF RELI.....</b>		<b>75</b>
5.1.	Effectiveness of the Sustainability Measures.....	75
5.2.	Economic Sustainability of the RELI Project .....	75
5.3.	Institutional Sustainability .....	77
5.3.1	Development and Strengthening of Second-tier Institutions .....	78
5.3.2	Implication of Second-Tier Institutions .....	78
5.4.	Social Sustainability.....	79
5.5.	Environmental Sustainability.....	80
5.6.	Exit Strategy.....	80
5.7.	Challenges and Way forwards .....	81
<b>CHAPTER VI: RELI ACHIEVEMENT AGAINST THE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK.....</b>		<b>82</b>
6.1.	Implementation of RELI Project.....	82
6.2.	Budget Envelope of RELI.....	87
6.3.	Achievements as per Results Framework .....	88
6.4.	Monitoring & Evaluation Plan - PDO Indicators.....	92
<b>CHAPTER VII: REVIEW OF THE RELI HR POLICY AND MANUAL.....</b>		<b>97</b>
7.1.	Strategic Review of the HR Policy and Manual of the RELI Project.....	97
7.2.	Monitoring and Learning .....	100
7.3.	Assessing the Performance of Project Staff in Relation to their TOR.....	102
7.4.	Assessing Staff Performance and Responsibilities for Enhanced Outcomes.....	104
<b>CHAPTER VIII: LESSONS LEARNED.....</b>		<b>105</b>
8.1.	Best Practices .....	105
8.2.	Challenges.....	107
<b>CHAPTER IX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.....</b>		<b>108</b>
9.1.	Recommendations.....	108
9.2.	Conclusion .....	112
<b>ANNEXURES.....</b>		

## LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 3.1: Percentage of households where income has been increased by 30% or more .....	15
Figure 3.2: Percentage of beneficiaries whose income has been increased by 30% or more .....	15
Figure 3.3: Producers' income has increased by 40% or more .....	16
Figure 3.4: Intervention households by poverty change in midterm compared to baseline.....	17
Figure 3.5: Status of Beneficiary Satisfaction (in %) .....	19
Figure 3.6: Relations between pillars, household resilience, and food security outcomes .....	23
Figure 3.7: RCI distribution .....	25
Figure 3.8: Histogram of RCI .....	25
Figure 3.9: Resilience Structure Matrix .....	25
Figure 3.10: Average RCI by Intervention and Control Group .....	26
Figure 3.11: Resilience structure matrix by Intervention and Control Group .....	27
Figure 4.1: Households' savings status (in %).....	65
Figure 4.2: Household's average savings amounts (in BDT) .....	67
Figure 4.3: Households accessed credits (in %).....	68
Figure 4.4: Households' accessed average credit amounts (in BDT) .....	68
Figure 4.5: Households having at least one member received at least one training .....	73
Figure 4.5: Households having at least one member received at least one training .....	73
Figure 5.1: Household members involved in salaried/wage employment and/or business/other economic activities (in %) .....	32
Figure 5.2: Households ownership by types of land (in %).....	35
Figure 5.3: Youths received IGA training (in %) .....	40
Figure 5.4: Food insecure households in the last month (in %).....	42
Figure 5.5: Average annual food expenditure in households (in BDT).....	43
Figure 5.6: Source of knowledge on selective nutrition issues in intervention groups (in %).....	45
Figure 5.7: Source of knowledge on selective nutrition issue in control groups (in %) .....	46
Figure 5.8: Colostrum feeding practices by the last pregnancy case (in %) .....	47
Figure 5.9: The last born child was having exclusive breastfeeding (in %) .....	47
Figure 5.10: Whether women took iron tablets in the last pregnancy (in %) .....	48
Figure 5.11: Practice taking additional food during the last pregnancy (in %) .....	48
Figure 5.12: The practice of washing vegetables (in %).....	49
Figure 5.13: Having at least one sick member in the household in the last four weeks (in %) .....	50
Figure 5.14: Knowledge of critical times of handwashing (in %) .....	52
Figure 5.15: Appropriate handwashing practice (with soap for 20 seconds, in %) .....	53
Figure 5.16: Household access to improved sanitation (in %).....	54
Figure 5.17: The average age of the last girl who got married in the household.....	61
Figure 5.18: The average age of the last girl who got married in the household.....	61
Figure 5.19: Households facing at least one disaster in the year preceding the mid-term survey .....	63
Figure 5.20: Major coping mechanisms during a disaster in the last year .....	64

Table 1.1: Intervention regions under the RELI Project .....	2
Table 1.2: Brief Outlook of RELI Project.....	2
Table 1.3: Sample summary for RELI mid-term .....	5
Table 2.1: The household size and gender distribution.....	8
Table 2.2: The female-male ratio of the households.....	8
Table 2.3: Literacy and Education .....	9
Table 2.4: Village Characteristics of Administrative Centres and Village Households .....	10
Table 2.5: Social and Human Development Facilities in Villages (average) .....	10
Table 2.6: Village Communication and Energy Infrastructures (in %) .....	11
Table 3.1: Average yearly income in households by household categories (in BDT).....	14
Table 3.2: Variable-wise satisfaction change (in %) .....	21
Table 3.3: Average RCI at baseline and midline by treatment status and DID estimate .....	26
Table 3.4: RIMA midline variables description and t-test of baseline .....	28
Table 3.5: RIMA midline variables description and t-test of mid-term.....	29
Table 3.6: Average RCI of intervention households by region .....	30
Table 4.1: Households savings deposit mode (in %, multiple responses) .....	66
Table 4.2: Percentage distribution of credit amounts.....	69
Table 4.3: Credit sources of households (in %) (multiple responses).....	69
Table 4.4: Summary of the impact of the One-Time Grant (OTG) .....	72
Table 5.1: Households having members involved in agricultural production (in %) .....	33
Table 5.2: Households Land Status.....	36
Table 5.3: Average market price of household assets (in BDT) .....	37
Table 5.4: Households with unemployed youth (in %).....	38
Table 5.5: Have accurate knowledge of key nutrition issues (in %).....	44
Table 5.6: Types of major illness reported in households (in %, multiple responses).....	50
Table 5.7: Place of treatment (in %) .....	51
Table 5.8: Source of knowledge on handwashing at selective critical times (in %) (multiple responses) .....	52
Table 5.9: The primary source of drinking water for households (in %).....	53
Table 5.10: Household used types of sanitation facilities (in %).....	54
Table 5.11: Households where women can participate in major decision-making (in %).....	56
Table 5.12: Households' practice of women's rights issues (in %; selective; and where applicable) ...	58
Table 5.13: Women's asset holding (in %; where applicable) .....	59
Table 7.1: Different types of Cash Grant Support for the beneficiaries of the RELI Project .....	82
Table 7.2: Beneficiaries involved in On-farm, Off-farm, Non-farm and sector-wise IGA .....	85
Table 7.3: Achievements as per Results Framework PDO Level Results Indicators .....	90
Table 7.4: Monitoring & Evaluation Plan: PDO Indicators.....	93
Table 7.5: Overview of Monitoring Tools and Their Effectiveness in the RELI Project .....	95
Table 8.1: Institutional Structure and Roles for the RELI .....	97
Table 8.2: List of SDF Monitoring Division Database .....	100
Table 8.3: Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework and Data Management Overview for the RELI Project .....	101

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Introduction:** The Social Development Foundation (SDF), with funding from the World Bank, is driving the Resilience, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Improvement (RELI) Project in Bangladesh to enhance livelihoods, build resilience, and support rural entrepreneurship among poor and extreme poor households. Launched in October 2021 with a US\$341 million budget, the project operates across 3,200 villages in 68 upazilas of 20 districts from seven project administrative regions. The project prioritizes immediate livelihood support, economic recovery from COVID-19 and climate-related shocks, and sustainable entrepreneurship development. This mid-term impact assessment evaluates the project's progress against its objectives, identifying successes, challenges, and areas for improvement.

**Methodology:** The mid-term impact assessment of the RELI project utilized a robust mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods for a comprehensive evaluation. Quantitative analysis included household and village-level surveys, employing statistical techniques like t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis to assess the project's impact on income, employment, savings, and agricultural productivity. Qualitative methods such as focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and case studies provided in-depth insights into beneficiaries' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the project. The methodology triangulated quantitative and qualitative data to ensure reliability and present a holistic picture of the project's impacts. The early signs of impact assessment (ESIA) employed a quasi-experimental design, tracking the same households over time to measure changes attributable to the project. While external shocks and regional disparities were considered, the methodology provided valuable insights into the RELI project's successes and challenges, highlighting areas for improvement and sustainability.

**Demographics:** The RELI project surveyed 5,638 households across 567 villages, with 3,467 in the intervention group and 2,171 in the control group. Intervention households experienced a 7.9% increase in size, likely due to reverse migration. Both groups had a balanced gender distribution, slightly increasing female representation in intervention groups. Since poverty in intervention households reduced 27.7%. However, still around 46% of intervention households remains poor which is significantly higher than the national estimates (according to HIES 2022, the poverty rate in the rural area is 20.5%). In the control group the poverty rate is still 73.7% with only 1% decrease since baseline. Remittance inflows increased substantially in intervention households (73.1%). Intervention regions also showed a diversification in savings practices, with Gram Samiti (Village Organization) gaining popularity. Educationally, literacy rates improved in intervention groups (72.1% to 74.6%), and mean years of schooling rose from 4.16 to 6.3 years. Youth unemployment decreased in intervention regions (down to 6% from 11%), and 22.4% participated in training programs compared to 1.6% in control regions.

**Project Component Progress:** The RELI project has made significant progress in improving livelihoods and enhancing resilience for its beneficiaries. The project successfully increased income for 151,657 beneficiaries, surpassing the target of 81,536, of whom 97% are female. Additionally, 37.2% of project beneficiaries changed their poverty status, exceeding the 5% target. Overall, RELI reached 831,128 direct beneficiaries, with a satisfaction rate of 66.1%. Further, 3828 producers reported an income increase of at least 40%, exceeding the target of 500, and the RIMA index score increased by 12.8% at mid-term compared to baseline.

In terms of community development and institutional strengthening, the project formed 63 RELI Community Societies, surpassing the target of 50, and registered 217 producer groups against 50 for July 2024. Beneficiaries also gained improved access to climate-resilient infrastructure, with 475,903 individuals benefiting from such projects compared to a target of 300,000. Health and nutrition capacity was enhanced for 469,905 beneficiaries, achieving double of the target. The project also excelled with a 99% rate of grievances redressed within stipulated timeframes and a follow-up measure implementation rate of 95% from social audits and community monitoring reports. Overall, the RELI project has effectively met or exceeded its targets across various indicators, demonstrating its positive impact on livelihoods and community resilience.

**Project Development Indicators:** The RELI project has made notable strides toward its Project Development Objectives (PDOs). Income improvements were substantial, with 37.2% of beneficiaries experiencing a 30% or more increase and 5.9% of producers seeing over 40% growth. While poverty alleviation showed progress, the project has achieved notable milestones, with 27.5% of households experiencing poverty reduction under the PPP approach (Income-based), 38.2% under the PIP approach (Income-based), and 20.7% under the PIP approach (Income & asset-based) transitioning out of poverty. However, the project continues to work towards achieving more significant reductions and ensuring sustainable improvements in livelihoods. Beneficiary satisfaction was high overall, reaching 66.1%, particularly strong among ethnic (87.5%) and youth (67.9%). Women's empowerment was evident, with over 76% of households reporting women's active participation in financial decisions. Although detailed resilience measures are still being finalized, early indicators suggest improved coping capacity for economic and environmental shocks.

**Early Signs of Impact:** The RELI project has already substantially impacted the lives of beneficiaries. Household incomes saw a 38.6% increase, benefiting the most vulnerable. Economic diversification flourished, with a 41% surge in salaried employment and a 26.9% increase in business participation. The percentage of household members involved in crop cultivation increased from 17.9% to 53.8% in intervention households, while those engaged in livestock rearing rose from 32.9% to 61.3%. Additionally, participation in poultry rearing and aqua/fish culture also saw substantial increases, indicating a diversification of income-generating activities. Aquaculture initiatives in Barishal, growing from 0.98% to 6.1%, showcased promising potential. The percentage of households taking credit jumped from 36.8% to 87.1%, reflecting improved access to financial resources. Combining all this, 88.8% of beneficiary households experienced improved resilience.

The assessment also highlights notable advancements in the happiness index among beneficiaries, with satisfaction regarding economic conditions rising from 3.2% to 74.5% and social inclusion from 15.0% to 72.7%. Health and nutrition satisfaction improved significantly, with households reporting satisfaction levels of 70.6% regarding health conditions and 57.6% concerning daily food intake. Furthermore, the resilience capacity index showed an increase from 41.39 to 54.23, indicating enhanced resilience among households participating in the project.

Women's empowerment has also progressed, with a significant rise in decision-making capabilities regarding household finances and participation in income-generating activities. The percentage of households where women can make decisions about spending from savings increased from 61.2% to 76.4%, while those making decisions on loans rose from 55.1% to

74.4%. Additionally, women's involvement in discussions about marriage within the household surged from 19.8% to 71.4%, reflecting a shift toward greater gender equality and empowerment in decision-making processes. Overall, the RELI project has positively impacted employment, economic stability, health, and women's empowerment among its beneficiaries. These improvements have led to greater financial security, diversified income streams, and enhanced food security among beneficiaries. However, regional disparities, market access barriers, and climatic disruptions like flooding continue to hinder progress in some regions.

**Implementation efforts** have been largely successful, particularly in promoting income-generating activities (IGAs) like livestock rearing, poultry farming, and aquaculture. The formation of Producer Groups and Savings Groups has strengthened community institutions and improved access to credit. However, regional disparities, especially in areas vulnerable to climate change, have slowed growth in certain sectors. The Project faces challenges in human resource management, particularly related to understaffing, overlapping responsibilities, and logistical barriers, which affect staff performance and project delivery. The project follows a five-tier institutional framework but struggles with high staff turnover and vacancy issues, especially at the district and cluster levels. To address these, the project needs to expand its staff roster and streamline roles, allowing staff to focus on core responsibilities and improve efficiency. Despite challenges such as delayed loan disbursements and limited market linkages, the Project's monitoring systems and tools support transparency, decision-making, and progress tracking. Addressing staffing issues and improving logistical support will help the project meet its targets and ensure sustainable outcomes for its beneficiaries.

**Mid-term achievements based on the Results Framework** show strong progress in improving livelihoods, enhancing resilience, and fostering rural entrepreneurship. Key indicators like income increases, poverty reduction, entrepreneurship, and resilience have all surpassed targets. The project has also successfully exceeded targets for climate-resilient infrastructure and community development, engaging vulnerable populations and empowering them through training, leadership, and capacity-building initiatives. Mid-term findings suggest that additional funding may be needed to address infrastructure gaps and further support entrepreneurship, climate resilience, and community capacity building.

**The Monitoring and Learning System** is the key to the project's success, and it includes third-party process monitoring (PMA), the management information system (MIS), and the loan management system (LMS). These tools provide real-time data, ensuring effective project management and transparency. The Results Framework (RF) tracks the project's development objectives and measures progress against set targets, providing a comprehensive view of performance. The GEMS tool and Village Grading process further enhance monitoring by evaluating village institution performance.

**RELI Sustainability:** The RELI Project has successfully integrated sustainability measures that enhance community resilience, promote financial independence, and foster environmental stewardship. By empowering beneficiaries with income-generating activities, low-interest loans through the Revolving Fund, and skills development, the project has enabled economic sustainability, reducing vulnerability to economic and climate-related shocks. Strong community institutions, including Village Institutions and Producer Groups, have been established, ensuring that governance, financial management, and resource allocation continue autonomously beyond the project's timeline. The project has empowered women and marginalized groups, improved social cohesion, addressed social issues like child marriage and dowry, and facilitated better access to education and healthcare. Environmental sustainability

has been advanced through the promotion of climate-resilient agricultural practices, disaster-resilient infrastructure, and sustainable natural resource management. Despite challenges such as delayed loan disbursements and limited market linkages, the project's comprehensive approach, including strategic partnerships and targeted awareness campaigns, has paved the way for long-term success. As a result, beneficiaries have achieved financial independence, strengthened social capital, and developed the capacity to sustain the project's outcomes well beyond its conclusion.

### Best Practices

1. *Empowering Communities*: Fostering community-driven income-generating activities (IGAs) like livestock rearing, poultry farming, and vegetable cultivation.
2. *Lifting Marginalized Groups*: Empowering women through IGAs and providing skill development opportunities for youth.
3. *Expanding Financial Access*: Offering low-interest loans and promoting savings to enable beneficiaries to start or expand businesses.
4. *Improving Health and Nutrition*: Promoting healthy lifestyles, providing access to clean water, and encouraging home gardening.
5. *Tailoring Solutions*: Customizing interventions to suit regional needs and challenges.
6. *Providing Comprehensive Training*: Equipping beneficiaries with financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and technical skills.
7. *Boosting Household Incomes*: Increasing incomes, particularly for vulnerable groups, through diversified livelihoods and improved agricultural practices.
8. *Empowering Women and Youth*: Breaking down social barriers and enabling women and youth to participate in economic activities.
9. *Strengthening Agricultural and Aquaculture*: Promoting climate-resilient farming practices and supporting aquaculture development.
10. *Improving Access to Productive Assets*: Enabling beneficiaries to acquire land and productive assets to scale up their activities.

### Challenges

1. *Geographic and Socioeconomic Disparities*: Unequal access to opportunities due to regional variations and social inequalities.
2. *Market and Supply Chain Constraints*: Limited market access and inadequate infrastructure hinder product sales.
3. *Climate Change and Environmental Vulnerabilities*: Climate-related challenges impacting agricultural and aquaculture activities.
4. *Financial Access and Sustainability*: Challenges in securing loans and maintaining economic stability.
5. *Sociocultural Barriers*: Traditional norms hinder women's participation and limit youth opportunities<sup>1</sup>.
6. *External Factors*: Unpredictable weather patterns and rising costs impacting livelihoods.
7. *Sustainability of Interventions*: To ensure the long-term sustainability of IGAs and community initiatives, ongoing support and capacity building are needed.

---

<sup>1</sup> In selected project areas, religious beliefs restrict women's roles within the household, limiting their access to education and employment. Additionally, household heads' belief that girls will eventually leave their families after marriage leads to a reluctance to invest in their education or economic development, as their contributions are seen as temporary. Meanwhile, the movement and activities among married women are considered a risk to household reputation. This exclusion of women and girls, who make up half of the population and youth, limits overall economic opportunities, stifles innovation, and hinders long-term growth.

**Recommendations:** The mid-term impact assessment of the RELI project highlights considerable progress in improving livelihoods, resilience, and entrepreneurship in rural Bangladesh. To further enhance the project's impact, the following key recommendations are proposed:

1. *Ensure active LGI Representative engagement:* RELI needs to engage local government leaders effectively in all possible layers especially in the district (RDCS), cluster (RCCS) and Village (GP) level for planning, implementation and demands articulation for the poor and extreme of community members in the project areas.
2. *Tailored Interventions:* Customize programs to specific regional needs, such as focusing on aquaculture in Barishal and market connectivity in Rangpur.
3. *Strengthen Market Access:* Improve infrastructure, establish collection centres, and facilitate partnerships to help producers sell their products.
4. *Address Economic Challenges:* Support community-led food production, subsidize essential inputs and provide financial literacy training.
5. *Introduce an Inception Period and Adaptive Implementation Strategy:* To address delays caused by the complex procurement process, introduce an inception period where preparatory activities.
6. *Expanding and exploring IGA opportunities for the beneficiaries:*
  - a. RELI may introduce a structured follow-up mechanism for the ongoing technical support for Income Generating Activities (IGAs) and small businesses.
  - b. The current two-day training for producer group members is insufficient. RELI should consider extending the training duration to allow for comprehensive learning and practical experience. Introduce follow-up technical support to reinforce learning and application of the IGA model.
  - c. Project needs to introduce follow-up support to ensure fair wages and stable employment opportunities for youth group members, particularly those recently employed.
  - d. Conduct thorough assessments of potentially profitable IGAs tailored to the geographical context and market demand of each project location. Program may identify and adopt less explored or unexplored IGAs that may be of high demand to result higher financial returns.
  - e. Program may launch a performance award initiative to recognize and promote outstanding IGA and entrepreneurship performances among community members. This initiative could motivate individuals to excel and elevate local success stories to a national level.
  - f. Expand the range of IGAs specifically designed for women. Consider IGAs that can generate income without having to move to different district or city for job placement.
7. *Flexibility in fund adjustment:* In some cases, allocation per household, and the total package with RDF and MCW may need adjustment instead of equal allocation for all unit (i.e., a village). The project can introduce a provision of proportional fund redistribution within available resources (units, for example a village, with larger number of eligible beneficiaries should have larger allocation of funds).
8. *Scale Up Success Stories:* RELI should advertise exceptional success stories, such as aquaculture success in Barishal and poultry farming in Rangpur to its remaining

regions. Moreover, the project should facilitate inter-region learning exchanges among beneficiaries to foster innovation and adaptability.

9. *Redesign Register Maintenance System:* RELI staff and community leaders have to maintain hand written paper based registers. According to the register keepers the number of records keeping registers for the office management and record keeping (by GS and different committees and sub-committees of village institutions) has become a burden. Also, preparing and maintaining these registers is burdensome for the committee leaders or office bearers in the community. RELIP needs to consider preparing a more efficient register keeping mechanism.
10. *Fulfilling the Group Formation and Registration:* Group activities are vital to income generation and livelihood development for target rural community. Formation and capacity-building support for a majority PGs have already been completed, with a few exceptions in some project areas. RELI needs to take prompt steps to complete the formation and registration of the remaining targeted producer groups.
11. *Addressing Conflict of Interest:* RELIP needs to pay proper attention so that the placement and provision of village-level small infrastructure activities do not create any conflict of interest among the community.

**Conclusion:** The RELI project has demonstrated considerable potential to address rural Bangladesh's poverty and vulnerability. By implementing these recommendations, the project can enhance its impact and ensure long-lasting benefits for the target communities.

## SUMMARY OF KEY PDO INDICATORS

### ASSESSMENT RESULTS FOR SELECTED KEY INDICATORS

Results Framework Indicator		Assessment Findings	Mid-Term Target	Status
Number of beneficiaries with an income increase of at least 30% from Income Generating Activities and increased employment		At least a 30% increase in income between baseline and mid-term has been secured in <b>37.2% (151,657 beneficiaries) of beneficiaries<sup>2</sup></b> .	20% (81,536 beneficiaries)	Target Achieved
Share of project beneficiaries in RELI villages changing poverty status		Intervention households in RELI villages changed their poverty status between baseline and mid-term <sup>3</sup> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PPP approach (Income based)=27.5%</li> <li>• PIP approach (Income based)=38.2%</li> <li>• PIP approach (Income and asset-based)=20.7%</li> </ul>	5%	Target Achieved
Share of beneficiaries who are satisfied with project activities	Overall	<b>66.1%</b>	60%	Target Achieved
	Female	<b>66.1%</b>	60%	
	Youth	<b>67.9%</b>	60%	
	IPs and other disadvantaged groups	<b>87.5%</b>	60%	
Number of producers and rural entrepreneurs with increased income of at least 40%		At least a 40% increase in income between baseline and mid-term has been secured in <b>58.9% (3,828 beneficiaries) of intervention producers.</b>	20% (500 producers and rural entrepreneurs)	Target Achieved
Share of beneficiaries with improved resilience		<b>88.8%</b> beneficiaries experienced at least 15% improvement in resilience (RIMA score)	5%	Target Achieved

<sup>2</sup> The baseline survey did not leave the opportunity to identify individual beneficiary income. So, the mid-term survey also initially undertook a household level assessment. However, in consultation with the World Bank and SDF team, the HDRC team later identified the individual line items by calling the respondents and extracting specific beneficiary income line to the maximum extent possible. Hence, the final assessment covers only the beneficiaries in the households.

<sup>3</sup> According to the Project Appraisal Document (PAD), the poverty status (or its change) of the beneficiaries (not households) is supposed to be assessed based on 'criteria set by the Government of Bangladesh'. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) considers consumption expenditure at the household level as the benchmark of poverty status. However, the baseline survey did not collect data on consumption expenditure.

The baseline survey adopted the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) approach by the World Bank (the international poverty line of \$2.15 per person per day) to define poverty. However, the baseline questionnaire did not allow for the segregation of income by independent household members. Hence, the assessment could only cover household poverty rather than an independent beneficiary. The baseline survey also adopted the Social Development Foundation's (SDF) criteria for selecting extreme poor. SDF applied the Participatory Identification of Poor (PIP) process for RELI beneficiary selection, which considered income (monthly household income BDT 8,000) and assets (landless or have land less than 5 decimal) to identify the poor and extreme poor households in the intervention area. So, in the absence of consumption expenditure which was comparable to HIES, the survey adopted the baseline strategy to assess poverty to ensure comparability.

Also, since the beneficiary selection, as well as the baseline covered PIP approach, and it covers income as well as assets, the 20% change is the most reliable among the poverty assessments methods adopted.

Variables	Indicators	Results						
		Intervention		Control		Gross Impact	Net Impact	
		Baseline	Mid-Term	Baseline	Mid-Term			
<b>Income</b>	Average household net income (yearly; BDT)	100634	149945	98413	110476	49311	37248	
	Households having one or more persons who sent remittance (%)	10.4	18.0	9.9	14.6	7.6	2.9	
	% of producers and rural entrepreneurs with increased income of at least 40%	N/A	57.0	N/A	37.6	N/A	19.4	
<b>Expenditure</b>	Average household food (purchased) expenditure (yearly; BDT.)	64,405	70,233	63,968	74,743	5,828	-4,947	
<b>Employment</b>	Household members involved in crop cultivation (%)	17.9	53.8	12.8	24.4	35.9	24.3	
	Household members involved in livestock rearing (%)	32.9	61.3	23.8	32.9	28.4	19.3	
	Household members involved in poultry rearing (%)	20.4	60.6	16.8	28.0	40.2	29.0	
	Household members involved in aqua/fish culture (%)	0.98	6.1	0.28	1.4	5.12	4.0	
	Households having members involved in business/other economic activities	23.9	50.8	26.8	26.7	26.9	27.0	
	<b>Credit</b>	Households took credit (%)	36.8	87.1	41.4	49.5	50.3	42.2
	Average amount of credit (BDT)	Among all HHs	19267	30880	21035	24059	11613	8589
<b>Youth Employment</b>	Households with unemployed youth (%)	11.0	6.0	6.0	5.4	-5.0	-4.4	
	Youth received training (%)	3.6	22.4	0.007	1.6	18.8	17.2	
<b>Assets</b>	Households having own/leased-in agricultural land (%)	6.0	38.0	4.0	15.8	32.0	20.2	
<b>Savings</b>	Households who saved (%)	25.4	98.4	28.8	39.7	73.0	62.1	
	Amount of savings among all households (average; BDT)	2,879	12,196	1,550	2,547	2,879	12,196	
<b>Health</b>	Households with sick member in the last four weeks preceding the survey (%)	96.7	76.8	95.9	70.2	-19.9	5.8	
<b>Hygiene</b>	Households having accurate knowledge and right practice of hand washing (%)	35.5	76.8	34.0	48.2	41.3	27.1	

Variables	Indicators	Results					
		Intervention		Control		Gross Impact	Net Impact
		Baseline	Mid-Term	Baseline	Mid-Term		
	Households know about washing both hands using soap after defecation (%)	27.6	84.0	27.7	80.0	56.4	4.1
	Households know about washing using soap after handling dirt (%)	13.8	54.7	13.5	48.3	40.9	6.1
	Households know about washing both hands using soap before feeding baby (%)	11.3	53.7	10.9	43.7	42.4	9.6
<b>Food and Nutrition</b>	Households having food insecure days in the last month	90.8	40.3	91.6	64.3	-50.5	-23.2
	Households where last born child was having exclusive breastfeeding	72.6	90.3	72.1	82.8	17.7	7.0
	Households where colostrums were fed to last-born child (%)	89.4	95.8	89.4	91.5	6.4	4.3
	Households where the last pregnant woman consumed additional food (%)	33.6	68.8	32.3	54.1	35.2	13.4
<b>Housing</b>	Households have a good condition dwelling (%)	98.8	99.0	98.3	98.9	0.2	-0.4
	Households with improved access to safe drinking water source (%)	35.3	99.6	35.7	99.7	64.3	0.3
	Households have access to hygienic latrines (%)	85.2	88.8	85.1	89.0	3.1	-0.8
	Households have electricity connection (%)	97.7	99.3	97.2	98.8	1.3	0.0
<b>Education</b>	Literacy rate in % (for 6 yrs. and above) (%)	72.1	74.6	69.5	70.0	2.5	2.0
<b>Women empowerment</b>	Households where women can make decisions about spending from savings (%)	61.2	76.4	60.3	57.8	15.2	17.7
	Households where women can make decisions on taking a loan (%)	55.1	74.4	54.2	52.6	19.3	20.9
	Households where women can make decisions to get involved in income-generating activities (%)	58.2	72.5	58.8	54.0	14.3	19.1
	Households where women can make decisions in getting involved with an organization/ <i>samity</i> /NGO (%)	64.8	72.7	62.2	51.8	7.9	18.3

Variables	Indicators	Results					
		Intervention		Control		Gross Impact	Net Impact
		Baseline	Mid-Term	Baseline	Mid-Term		
	Households where women's marriage had been discussed with the female members of the household (%)	19.8	71.4	16.2	66.1	51.6	1.7
	Households where women can participate in <i>shalish</i> / arbitration (%)	30.7	31.8	27.7	21.8	1.1	7.0

**\* Calculation of net impact:**

Intervention Mid-term (2024) = a, Intervention Baseline (2022) = b

Control Mid-term (2024) = c, Control Baseline (2022) = d

*Net impact of RELI = (a - b) - (c - d)*