

COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY 2024-2027



HELVETAS
BANGLADESH

WHO WE ARE

Helvetas is an independent Swiss development organization that is building capacity in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. We bring about real change in the lives of over three million left behind people every year.

We implement development projects in the areas of water, food and climate, education, jobs and private sector development, governance, gender and social equity. Helvetas also provides humanitarian aid and emergency response after disasters. We promote solidarity in spirit and in action and take part in the ongoing developmental policy dialogue.

Helvetas is denominationally neutral and politically independent, and we are a member of the Alliance2015, a strategic network of eight European non-governmental organizations.

In Bangladesh Helvetas started its activities in 2000, and is currently active in large parts of the country to promote sustainable and inclusive development, resilience to climate change, safe and informed migration, and good governance.

Helvetas works in **partnership with civil society organisations, government actors and the private sector** to reinforce their autonomy and strengthen local ownership of social and economic development.



We have created a programme to address multifaceted climate challenges in a holistic and programmatic way



We engage the private sector to foster inclusive economic growth through skills development and decent employments creation



We address governance challenges by supporting women to participate in politics and youth to prevent violent extremism



We promote safe migration through a right-based approach engaging with people on the move, their families, host communities, the public/private sector and government institutions



We have a solid expertise in humanitarian, development and peace nexus interventions, working with Rohingya refugees and host communities since 2017



Our vision is a just world in which all people determine the course of their lives in dignity and security, using environmental resources in a sustainable manner.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN BANGLADESH

Addressing Climate Crisis

Bangladesh is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. Many communities in climate hotspots are highly exposed to growing risks and have inadequate capacities to adapt to the changes.

Climate disasters like floods, cyclones

droughts or heat waves hit the country with increasing frequency, and require ever bigger preparedness measures. Ultimately they could over the next 30 years force more than 13 million people to migrate, mostly within the country.

Ensuring a Just Development

Bangladesh will graduate in 2026 from Least Developed Country (LDC) and aims to become Middle-Income Country (MIC) by 2031. Despite the remarkable economic growth and improvements in living standards over the last years, development has been unequal and a large part of the population is still excluded from its benefits. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen, alongside a broadening urban-rural divide. Women, mem-

bers of religious and ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities continue to be “left behind” in many areas of human development.

Further industrialisation, the spread of new technologies, and global economic uncertainties will bring new challenges, which the country will have to confront. Scarce investment in education and health remains major obstacles.

Protecting the Civic Space

In recent years civil society, especially human rights defenders, have faced increasing restrictions on their possibility to advocate for their cause. The government has introduced tighter controls on NGOs and adopted laws that are seen as limitations of the freedom of speech. Laws, such as the Cyber Security Act intended to curb

hate speech and disinformation online are hampering the ability of media to report on the diversity of voices and opinions.

Moreover, the slowing of the decentralization process and the perception of corruption and elite capture are eroding trust in public institutions.

Opportunities to Act

Building on over 20 years of experience, Helvetas will in the strategy period from 2024 – 2027:

- Engage with diverse private sector actors ranging from small, medium to large enterprises to ensure an inclusive, equal and sustainable growth;
- Tap into opportunities of digitalisation and provide youth with better opportunities to build their own future;
- Support climate change affected communities by reinforcing their capacities to adapt;
- Assist civil society to ensure meaningful participation in political decision-making processes, and government institutions to deliver socially inclusive services.





OUR WORKING AREAS

Water, Food and Climate

Although there is a substantial advancement in disaster management, the increasing number of climate-related emergencies represents a significant threat to water, food, and livelihood systems, and jeopardizes access to fundamental rights and basic services for millions.

Thus it is crucial to assist communities through context-specific, gender and climate-responsive plans, effective implementation of adaptation actions, adequate resource mobilization, capacity building, and inclusive policy processes.

Helvetas has been working since 2003 on building the resilience of climate-vulnerable communities. We engage on national policy dialogue to foster inclusive and innovative adaptive solutions and we advocate at international level for climate justice.

Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management (DRM)

Climate change adaptation will remain a priority and we will specifically work on: **resilient livelihoods** through climate smart agriculture and linking the supply and demand sides of the market system; **climate-induced migration** by supporting communities for planned migration through awareness

building, capacity enhancement, and information provision; **disaster risk management** by facilitating community risk assessments and risk reduction action plans, and by assisting communities to put these plans into action.

Climate Justice and Governance

We will continue to support communities that experience **loss and damage** to rebuild their livelihood. We will engage in **climate finance** initiatives and debates from local to global level, on the basis of fairness, responsibility, and justice. We will contribute to strengthen **climate governance** by supporting communities and civil society to advocate for more inclusive climate action planning through individual and collective action.

Inclusive Water Access

Helvetas works with communities and local authorities to increase access to climate-resilient and inclusive water, sanitation, and hygiene (**WASH**). We encourage local enterprises to offer adaptation technologies, ensuring a service and employment opportunities. We work with communities to ensure the human right to water and fair **water resources management**.

OUR WORKING AREAS

Skills, Jobs, Income

To consolidate its growth path towards Middle Income Country status, the Government of Bangladesh aims to create more than 100 million additional jobs, and facilitate the transition from an informal to a formal economy. But despite the efforts to strengthen the vocational training system, the mismatch between the availability and the demand for skills in the job market remains huge.

The private sector, in particular micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), plays a crucial role to bolster a sustainable development and to offer more opportunities to women and young people. Therefore, Helvetas reinforces its engagement with the private sector and enhances our skills development initiatives.

Private Sector Development

Building on our extensive experience on market system development, Helvetas will support local service providers, MSMEs and entrepreneurs to boost their competitiveness and identify new opportunities in agriculture and non-farming sectors. Helvetas promotes **business skills development**, financial literacy, better **access to financial services**. We further advocate for more conducive framework conditions and better **governance of market systems**.

Skills Development and Employment

We contribute to **strengthen public and private skills development systems** by facilitating the delivery of quality Vocational Education & Training (VET) more responsive to job market demand. We will specifically support skills development and career orientation for underserved and left behind young people, women and persons with disabilities by promoting practical-based skill and **digitalized training**. Helvetas is committed to promoting decent job opportunities.

Green Economy

Building on our large experience in value chain promotion and skills development we aim at fostering a sustainable economic growth.

We will support the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices and the **efficient use of natural resources**, (i.e. low water consumption crops and energy-efficient irrigation systems) to strengthen livelihoods resilience, market linkages and contribute to **food system transformation** and nutrition security.

Tapping into opportunities arising by the transition to energy-efficient technologies we will contribute to create **green jobs** and support SMEs and large enterprises to transform their businesses.



OUR WORKING AREAS

Voice, Inclusion and Cohesion

A vibrant society plays an important role in consolidating a country's development. Ensuring fundamental rights and equal opportunities to all citizens is key to boost the progress made on poverty reduction. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), activist and youth-led movements in Bangladesh demand stronger democratic rights, social justice, protection of civil liberties, transparency and accountability of public institutions. All these changes are possible only if people, organisations, and communities have the capacities and the opportunities to raise their voice.

Helvetas has a long experience in fostering civic engagement and social accountability, and strengthening

rights of, for and by women, youth, and left-behind groups. Our engagement will continue on:

Governance and Civic Space

We support women and communities in **advocating for more inclusive policies** and budget allocations in urban and local governance settings. A strong involvement of citizens ready to speak up for their rights and influence government actions will contribute to increase the **accountability of local authorities**. Simultaneously, Helvetas continues to work with government institutions at all levels to increase their capacities for a more inclusive and responsive service delivery.



Migration

People in search for better job opportunities or forced to leave their communities because of the impacts of climate change should be aware of their rights and fully understand risks and opportunities of their choice to migrate. Helvetas facilitates **access to information** about safe migration, and **access to justice** for migrants and their families in case of grievances. We improve capacities of local authorities and government departments to better coordinate and assist aspirant migrants both at their origin and their place of destination.

Youth Empowerment

When young people are aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens and can fully participate in the civic life, they gain a strong sense of purpose and become **agents of positive change**, promote inclusion, harmony and prevent violent extremism. Supporting them in building self-esteem, learning critical thinking, leadership and peace-building skills, is our priority. We accompany young people to harness arising opportunities from **digitalisation and new technologies** to build their own future. Moreover we stimulate private sector to invest on young people and offer them avenues to express their potential.



OUR FOCUS AREAS 2024 – 2027

Within our working areas, we focus on the following areas:

We increase our work in the Triple Nexus of humanitarian and emergency interventions, development programmes, and social cohesion.

We create more comprehensive and sustainable responses to crises, enabling affected communities to recover and rebuild their lives with greater resilience and self-reliance. Communities are at the centre in the design, implementation, and evaluation of humanitarian projects to ensure that interventions are relevant and sustainable, lay the foundation for sustainable development, and contribute to social harmony.

We enhance Gender Equality and Social Inclusion.

Helvetas continues to support initiatives that address the social, economic and political priorities of women, men, and youth of all gender in an equitable manner.

We work to enhance social and gender equity by challenging social norms and power dynamics. We strengthen inclusive growth through multi-stakeholder engagement (government, private sector, communities), and encourage people to advocate for underserved groups, community rights and participation in the decision-making process.

We leverage the Digital transformation.

Digitalization is a major global trend, reshaping politics, economies, and societies everywhere. It creates tremendous opportunities, but also bears the risk of leaving already underserved people even further behind and spreading misinformation, hate speech, harassment, etc.

Conscious of these risks, we use the opportunities digitalization provides to foster innovation for poverty alleviation, create employment opportunities especially for youth, strengthen cooperation and social cohesion, and increase the impact of our work.

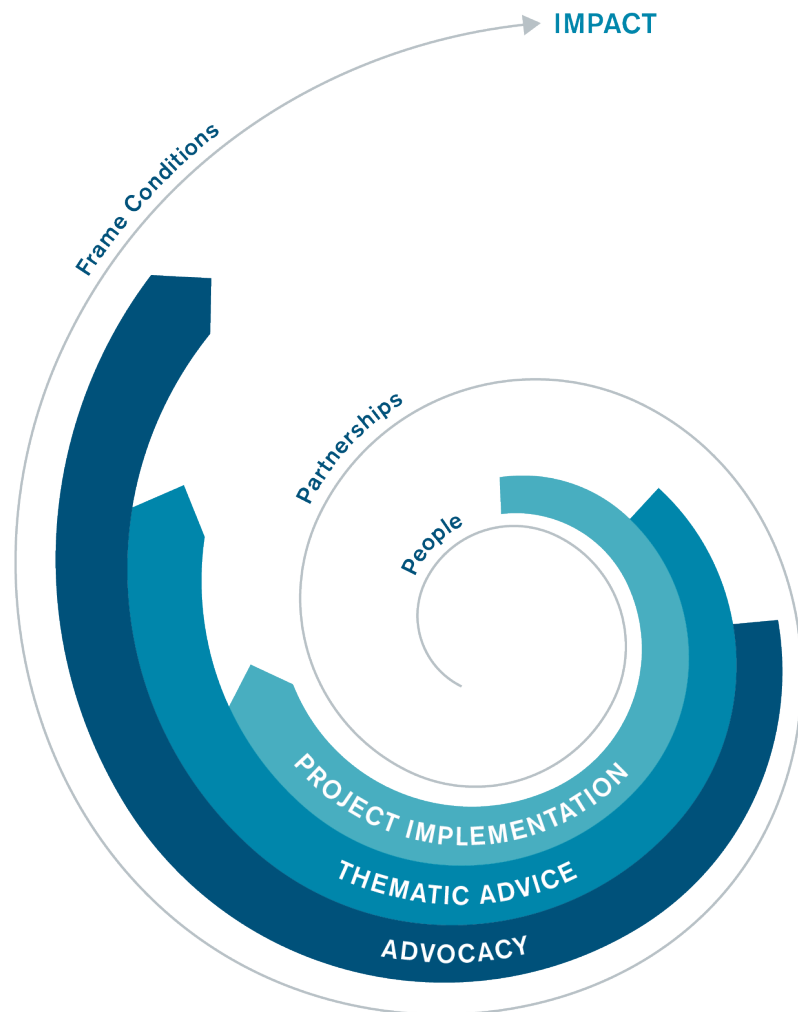
We further our engagement in semi-urban and urban contexts.

We recognise the growing integration of rural and urban areas through the movement of people, knowledge, and goods.

We address some of the most pressing urban development challenges, including urban poverty, access to affordable and nutritious food, and effective delivery of basic services. We tap into the potential of cities as hubs of transformation by engaging local authorities, private sector and civil society actors.



HOW WE ACHIEVE IMPACT



Helvetas combines **three mutually reinforcing intervention mechanisms**: We implement development and humanitarian response projects; we provide technical advice and build thematic competences; and we engage in awareness-raising, policy

dialogue, and advocacy. This is how we initiate, support, and influence **systemic change** that improves the lives of people in the short and long term, strengthens our partners, and fosters conducive frame conditions.

OUR KEY APPROACHES

Human rights based approach (HRBA)

Our programmes and projects promote political, social, economic, environmental, and cultural rights by strengthening the capacity of individuals and communities to claim their rights and supporting governments, local authorities and other duty bearers to fulfil their obligations.

From designing to implementing and evaluating our interventions we apply the four pillars of the HRBA:

- Universality and indivisibility
- Non-discrimination and equality
- Accountability and rule of law
- Participation and inclusion

Inclusive Systems Approach

Ensuring local ownership of development interventions is key to achieving a large and lasting impact. Thus, our role is to facilitate the engagement of local actors in enhancing systems' future capability to function and adapt to changing realities.

By adopting an Inclusive systems approach we stimulate system actors to adopt the right technical solutions, and we strengthen their capacity to address constraints and underlying power imbalances. Thus, our goal is not only to support communities

in improving their livelihood opportunities and wellbeing, but also to contribute to a better functioning of the economic, social and political systems so that they works for the underserved, mitigate disparities and promote social equity over the longer term.

Conflict sensitivity

We apply conflict sensitivity across all projects and activities to reduce the risk that we inadvertently contribute to exacerbate tensions and create conflict. This approach also helps us to spot opportunities to foster social cohesion.

Developing and managing project in a conflict sensitive way implies:

- Understanding the context in which we are working including the underlying political and economic interest and imbalances.
- Understanding what we are doing, and how we are doing it, affects the context
- Adapting our interventions to ensure we do not negatively affect the context, but rather increase our ability to successfully implement our projects in a sustainable manner.

OUR COMMITMENT TO PARTNERSHIP AND LOCALISATION

Sustainable change must be owned by local actors. Therefore, building equitable, reliable and strong partnership with civil society organisations, public authorities and private sector, is a fundamental pillar of our engagement. Strong, self-determined local actors guarantee that development steps are locally anchored and designed to last.

Helvetas is convinced that different actors with their specific capacities contribute to successful development processes. Thus, our vision of partnership is centred on capacity development: a mutual learning path enabling individuals, communities and organisations to steer and manage change processes.

The debate about localization and decolonization of aid is intensifying in both development and humanitarian sectors. It revolves around increasing local funding, strengthening coordination, participation, and local leadership. Building upon our experience in developing capacities and pro-actively connecting organisations, private sec-

tor and public players, **we promote the establishment of partnerships with national actors.** This cooperation is based on shared vision, mutual learning, development of joint competences to increase local partners self determination and jointly achieve a lasting impact and social justice.



OUR IMPACT IN 2020-2023

1,842,137

people had a fair opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty

252,742

people have improved their access to water and sanitation thanks to better local government services

358,862

people have improved their sustainable agricultural practices

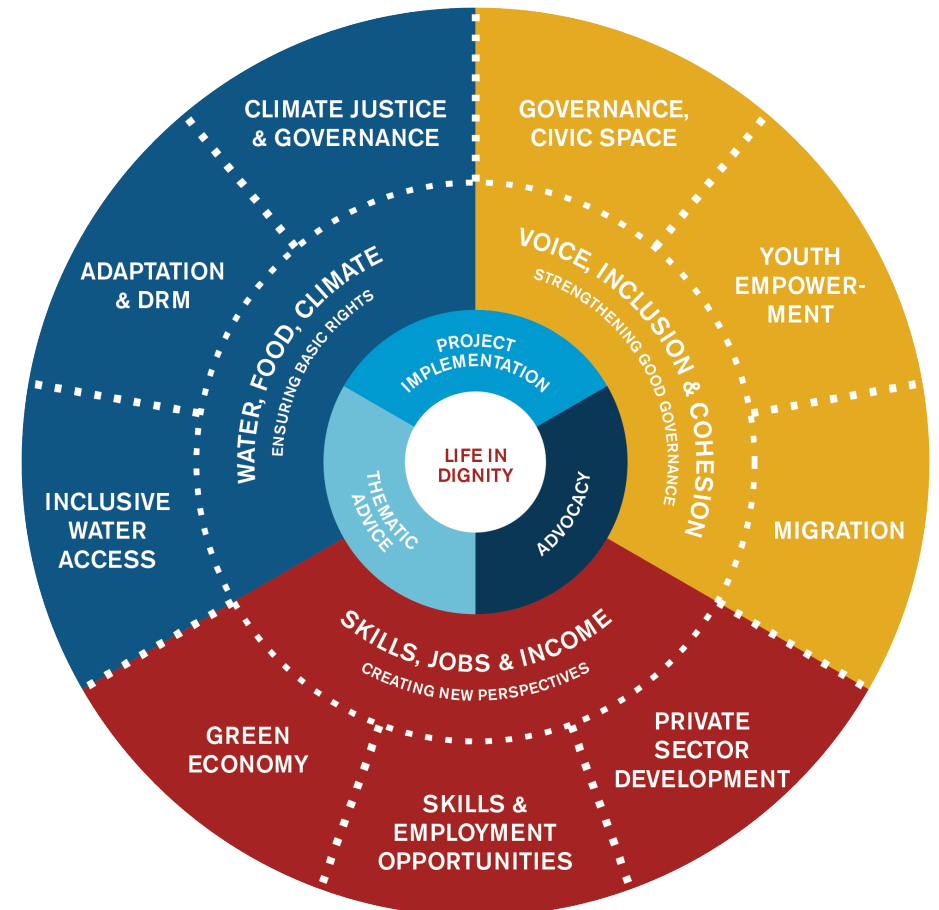
901,080

people have profited from safe migration experiences

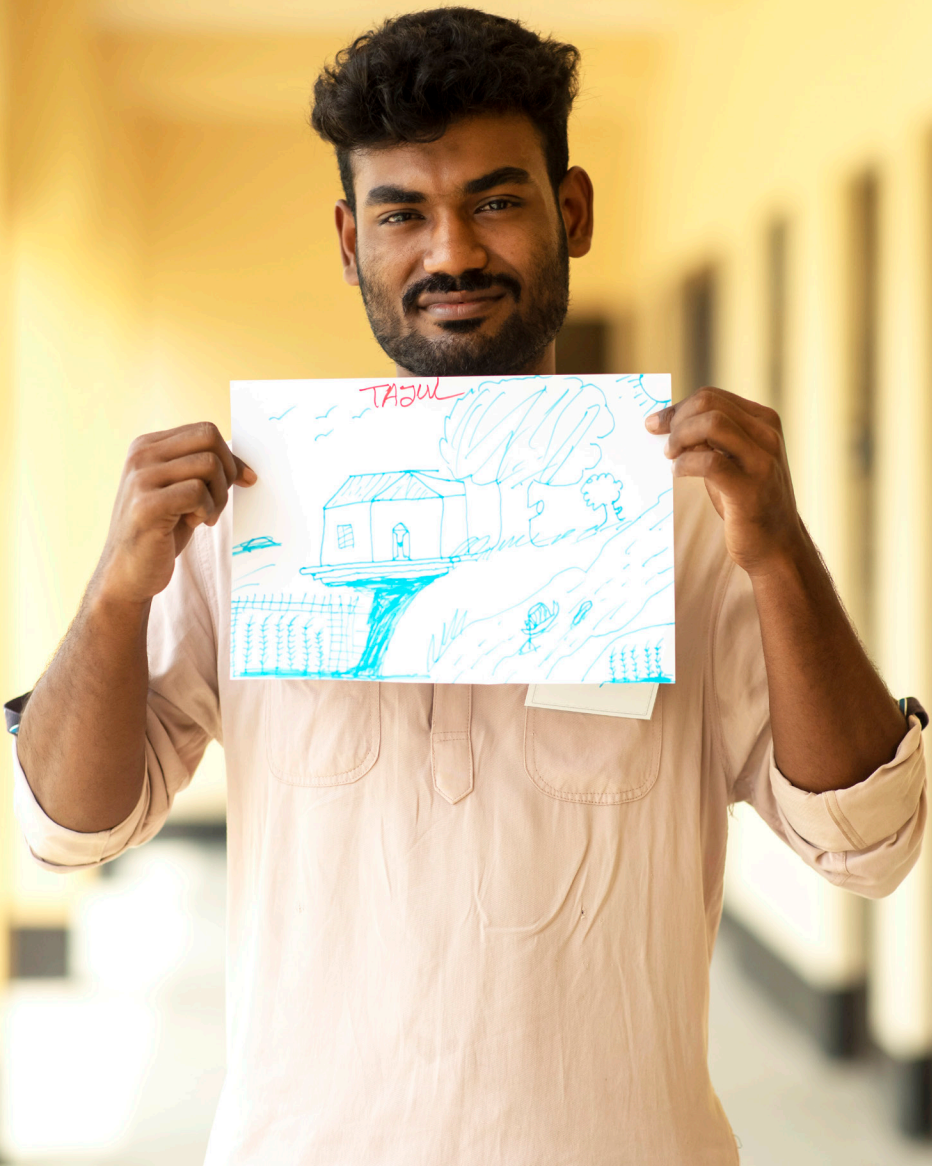
9,568

private sector partners are better equipped to sustainably conduct their business

HELVETAS BANGLADESH COUNTRY STRATEGY 2024-2027 AT A GLANCE



Photos: Cover KM Asad; pag. 3 KM Asad; pag. 4-5 Franca Roiatti; pag. 6 from top: Dipali Biswas (Shushilan), KM Asad; pag.9 KM Asad, top right Mosammat Kanon Lata; pag. 10 KM ASAD; pag. 11 Franca Roiatti; pag.12 Md. Monjurul Haque; pag.13 Ashikur Rahman; pag. 15-16 KM Asad; back cover KM Asad.



HELVETAS
BANGLADESH

helvetas.org/bangladesh