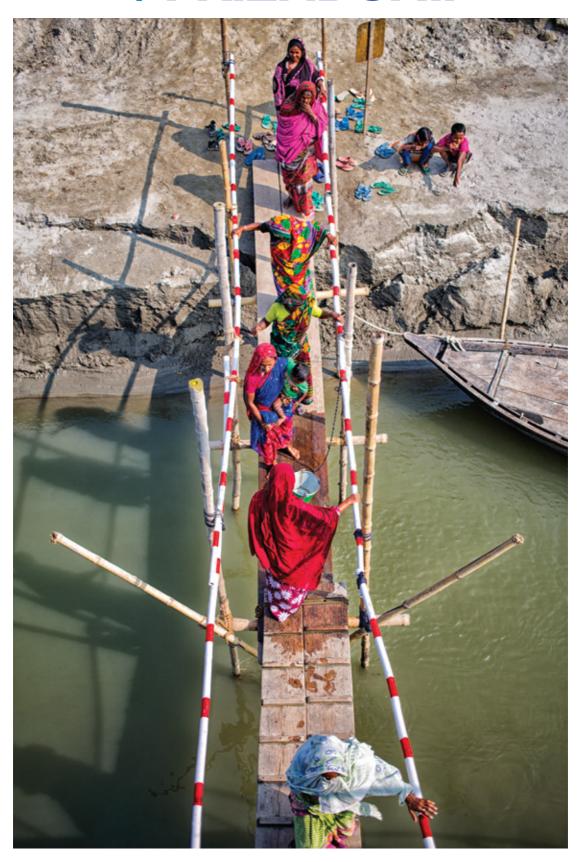
# FRIENDSHIP



### THE FRIENDSHIP WAY

**DIRECTION OF TRAVEL 2021 - 2023** 





### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

2	Foreword
4	Friendship's Vision
6	Friendship's Mission and Action
15	The Friendship Way
17	The Way Forward
20	Governance
22	What We Offer and What We Need
24	Friendship at a Glance

# THE WAY FORWARD, 20 YEARS ON...

#### by RUNA KHAN

Founder and Executive Director Co-Chair Friendship International

In 2021, Friendship entered its 20<sup>th</sup> year of operations. What started as a small group of people trying to help ease the suffering of unaddressed migratory communities living in extreme poverty has grown to become an international Social Purpose Organisation (SPO)\* present in six countries, serving millions each year.

Our work with marginalised and deprived communities in remote regions where crises and natural disasters are omnipresent, has taught us much. Through each new crisis, be it Cyclone Sidr in 2007 and its aftermath, the arrival of the displaced Rohingya in 2017 or the havoc caused by the ever-increasing frequency and intensity of floods in the chars (river islands) and coastal belt of Bangladesh, Friendship has not only managed to maintain continuity of services but has emerged stronger. The Covid-19 pandemic, a challenge shared by the whole world, has now created solidarity and a global understanding of the effects that such major crises can have on individuals and populations.

Now is a perfect time to look forward and to build for the future on the foundation of our experience.

#### Responding to global challenges

The world of humanitarian and development aid needs to be changed fundamentally. On the one hand, the world's biggest challenges—the climate crisis, migration, terrorism, pandemics—are accelerating and defying all borders; on the other hand, traditional methods of delivering aid across borders are simply not possible or are not providing lasting solutions. This has to change.

#### Sharing our model

Friendship has many strengths that are now being recognised by the international development aid community as essential to success. We have spent 20 years in strengthening the work itself and the organisation, so that scaling can be done on firm roots. One of our goals for the future is to



spread awareness of our model and its benefits more globally, and work with those organisations who feel that their own organisation may be strengthened by using some of our components.

#### A truly global team

I am proud to have founded and be part of an international organisation where we work as a global team. Each participating entity contributes its particular expertise and ensures optimal use of resources, irrespective of the conventional distinction between north and south. We will continue to work towards a development ecosystem which nurtures respectful multilateral partnerships, that recognises the unique value of each partner, and trusts local organisations for their capacity to understand needs and bring the right solutions.

#### Solutions from the field

We have long realised that solutions are frequently found within the local communities. These are the source of insightful information and ideas because they grapple with challenges in their everyday lives. Our work has benefitted greatly from listening closely to grassroots voices and working together with local communities. The only way to create long-lasting impact and generate true development is to ensure that communities become more resilient and empowered to make their own decisions.

#### A voice for the unheard

Organisations working on the frontline are rarely heard in the global conversation and in international summits. They also find it difficult

2



From its very beginnings, Friendship created an innovative solution—a floating hospital—in riverine areas where building permanent structures is impossible.

to access resources otherwise than as mere "implementing organisations" on behalf of major international organisations who work out solutions from afar. I would like Friendship to lend a voice to these grassroots organisations and help them access resources that fit their needs.

#### Organisational strengthening

Controlled growth and the ambition to spread our model require a strong organisation. We shall continue to work on strengthening our own organisation, particularly in the rapidly changing areas of technology and information systems (for example through the extended use of our mobile phone-based mHealth system) thereby increasing both benefits and our efficiency.

We intend also to increase our research capacity in partnership with selected universities, sharing our knowledge and data from the field with their academic skills to help us continue to find innovative and optimal solutions.

We shall also be looking to improve communication about our work, particularly through our website and social media, as our intention to share the benefits of our operating model can only be achieved if we have effective means to inform people about what we do. The message on what we do is clearly articulated through Friendship's four commitments to:

- Saving Lives,
- Poverty Alleviation,
- Climate Adaptation and
- Empowerment.

#### Thank you

I wish to thank all our Friendship staff, who have shown extraordinary commitment and dedication, particularly when crises in recent years have imposed an almost superhuman effort on their part. I do not say this lightly, and it is with tears in my eyes that I say I am unable to find words adequate to express my appreciation to them.

The trust and support of the Friendship Board members in Bangladesh has been a great source of strength for me throughout this difficult year. And I hardly know how to express my thanks for the incredible daily work given to Friendship from our International teams in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Our work would certainly not be possible without the continued commitment of our valued partners who journey with us, providing advice as well as financial and other resources and enabling us to design and implement sustainable programmes to help meet the actual needs of the people we strive to serve. I look forward to their continued support and also to welcoming additional partners who will join us on our journey.

Friendship is an international team built of people who share a common vision of verity, goodness, truth, reality and hard work. I can only hope that, seeing the impact of our work, many others will be encouraged to join this journey of solidarity and love.

Runa Khan

## FRIENDSHIP'S VISION

#### **FACING GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

Friendship is an international Social Purpose Organisation guided by its vision of a world where people—especially the hard to reach and unaddressed—have equal opportunities to live with dignity and hope.

Friendship's guiding vision has remained unchanged since the start of its operations in 2002 in the chars—or river islands—of the Jamuna/Brahmaputra river in northern Bangladesh. It was with the goal of bringing hope and opportunity to the unaddressed communities of the chars that Friendship's hospital ships and subsequent programmes were conceived.

Over the years, the vision of extending opportunities to the unaddressed has become ever more relevant as the following issues grappled with from the beginning, are now recognised as major global problems.

#### The climate crisis

In 2002, while the world was only beginning to understand the importance of climate change as a phenomenon that would shape the world of tomorrow, the climate-impacted communities of Bangladesh, such as the char areas, were already facing its consequences.

Outside the protection of embankments, and directly exposed to the elements, these areas are vulnerable to floods, storms and other recurring disasters. In the chars it is common to find families who have shifted home more than 15 times due to river erosion. Each time the family has to start again from scratch on a new island represents a crushing blow to morale and hope.

Today it is recognised internationally that the climate crisis is reshaping our lives and livelihoods. In the first half of 2020 alone,



The river islands of North Bengal, are prone to erosion. It is common to find families who have been forced to shift home more than 15 times.



Going well beyond his call of duty, a Friendship Community Paralegal carries an elderly woman across a flooded area.

almost 10 million people were displaced by climate disasters worldwide. Addressing the impacts of the changing climate is the foremost priority of the world today.

#### **Exclusion from vital services**

A 2017 report by WHO and the World Bank shows that half of the world's population lacks access to essential health services. One in five people around the world lacks sufficient access to justice. In South Asia, almost 40% of children who should be in upper secondary school are left out. Large segments of people around the world are excluded from vital services and thus prevented from fulfilling their potential for themselves, their families and their communities.

The Jamuna is as much as 15 kilometres wide in some places during the wet season, and full of islands across its breadth. Some islands may be three or more hours away from the mainland by local boat. Due to their remoteness and the absence of infrastructure these char communities are largely excluded from vital public services.

#### Extreme poverty

Around 1.89 billion people, or nearly 36% of the world's population, live in extreme poverty. Nearly half the population in developing countries live on less than \$1.25 a day. 5 Global extreme poverty is expected to rise in 2020 for the first time in over 20 years due to Covid-19.6

The communities that Friendship works with endure severe poverty both because of the impact of recurring natural disasters and because their remoteness effectively excludes them from access to the mainstream economy and the support mechanisms available from the state.

#### Inequality

Economic inequality worldwide is such that the wealthiest 1% owns 45% of global personal wealth and wealthiest 50% owns more than 99%. This extreme inequality makes it more difficult for people from hard-to-reach and unaddressed communities to assimilate and grow in the mainstream economy. Gender inequality in the world's poorest countries is also extreme.

Bangladesh is no exception to this worldwide issue and its remarkable economic growth over the last 20 years has not benefitted all its citizens equally. Particularly those who live in remote and difficult to access areas have least benefitted from mainstream development.

As Bangladesh is at the forefront of these four global challenges, it can act as a laboratory for the world as it seeks their solutions.

- The bigger picture, Environmental Migration, October 2020
- World Health Organization and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and The World Bank, Tracking Universal Health Coverage: 2017 Global Monitoring Report 2017
- World Justice Project, Global Insights on Access to Justice:
   Findings from the World Justice Project General Population Poll in
   101 Countries 2019
- 4. Unicef, The state of the world's children 2019 statistical tables, October 2019
- 5. The World Bank, Poverty Overview, February 2021
- 6. The World Bank, Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020
- 7. Credit Suisse Research Institute, Global Wealth Report 2019, October 2019

## FRIENDSHIP'S MISSION AND ACTION TO MEET THE CHALLENGES

#### MISSION STATEMENT

From Bangladesh, a country facing the most pressing of humanity's challenges, we develop scalable solutions to strengthen marginalised communities, and empower people to transform their lives and reach their full potential.

In the face of the global challenges previously described, the solutions implemented by Friendship are expressed in its four commitments:

- Saving Lives
- Poverty Alleviation
- Climate Adaptation
- Empowerment



During Covid-19 shutdowns many daily wage labourers or factory workers lost their jobs overnight. Friendship stepped in with emergency aid.



In areas where people have hardly any access to vital health services and where exposure to natural disasters is an everyday reality, Friendship enacts the principle of universal access to healthcare and takes action to reduce unnecessary loss of life due to disasters.

#### **FLOATING HOSPITALS**

In its work in remote regions that are deprived of even the most basic services, Friendship's first priority was Saving Lives. From its very beginnings, Friendship created an innovative solution—a floating hospital. From 2021 onwards, Friendship will operate a total of seven floating hospitals in the north, as well as its mainland hospital in Shyamnagar in the south of the country, providing:

- surgery for common conditions such as cataracts and burns
- child healthcare
- maternal healthcare
- gynaecological and obstetric care
- dental and eye care
- cervical and breast cancer screening
- emergency services
- physiotherapy
- laboratory and imaging services
- referrals to specialist facilities

#### **HEALTHCARE FOR ALL**

The hospitals are now part of an integrated three-tier healthcare system, designed to ensure that healthcare is available to all in Friendship's areas of operation. In addition to the hospitals (tier 1) the system includes:



The purpose-built Emirates Friendship Hospital joined Friendship's fleet of floating hospitals in 2005.

#### Satellite and static clinics (tier 2)

Satellite clinic teams regularly visit isolated communities, spreading awareness of available health services and providing access to essential healthcare in communities far from the hospitals.

Static clinics operate from fixed premises and offer additional services such as dental and eye care, physiotherapy, cervical cancer screening and laboratory services.

### Community medic-aides and skilled birth attendants (tier 3)

Women trained by Friendship from within its working communities deliver primary healthcare services daily to their patients' doorsteps. In some of these communities, specially trained birth attendants provide ante- and post-natal care, safer deliveries and basic infant care.

#### mHealth application

Specially trained community health workers use Friendship's mobile phone-based system to collect and store patient data, diagnose common conditions, and connect remotely to a doctor's centre for prescriptions and assistance when necessary.

TIER 1









TIER 2



535 SATELLITE CLINICS/MONTH





TIER 3





<sup>\*</sup>These figures are accurate as of January 2021, anticipating the launch of five additional floating hospitals in mid-2021.

They exclude emergency projects in response to the Rohingya and Covid-19 crises.

#### **DISASTER RELIEF**

In the past, natural disasters have caused catastrophic loss of life in Bangladesh, and climate change is leading to increasing frequency and intensity of such events in recent years. Friendship contributes to saving lives through instigating preventive measures, training vulnerable communities and providing relief when disaster strikes.

#### Cyclone shelter and plinths

Friendship's cyclone shelter and plinths (micro-villages raised above flood levels) protect people and their assets when disasters strike

#### Planning and preventive measures

Friendship Disaster Management Committees work year-round to assess and minimise vulnerability to disasters, to plan rescue and

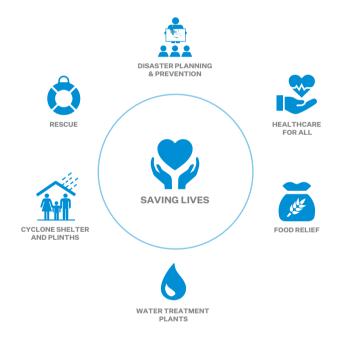
response strategies, and mitigate losses. These committees represent a cross-section of society, from the most vulnerable to the most resourceful, and are connected to the local government and other resource points.

#### Disaster relief and rescue

Emergency relief services ensure that the immediate needs of disaster victims, especially women, children, and people with special needs, are met. Volunteer teams composed of young women and men are trained in search and rescue techniques and connect with local government to ensure endangered people can get to safety and receive emergency supplies.

#### Water treatment plants

Water treatment plants in the coastal districts provide clean water to communities whose ground water is unsafe due to salinity.



During my visit to Friendship's work that we help fund in the chars of rural Bangladesh I saw once again that providing basic services to disadvantaged communities helps to enable human rights and to foster development. Access to healthcare via mobile hospital ships and to education are key elements of their work that are in line with our principles to empower communities. Access to legal counsel is also especially important as it helps women and girls to become less vulnerable.

Paulette Lenert Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, Luxembourg (June 2019)





Elimination of poverty is key to the effective realisation of nearly all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It is at the heart of a wide range of Friendship's interventions because it requires multi-faceted action in order to allow the most marginalised to benefit from mainstream development and economic growth.

#### **CAPACITY BUILDING**

Friendship empowers communities by creating pathways out of poverty.
Capacity-building programmes enable entrepreneurs to develop their skills, improve production, and adapt to changing natural environments.

#### Technical assistance

Experts at Friendship conduct regular training sessions, and visit farmers and fishermen to advise and provide technical assistance on modern agriculture techniques, subsistence farming and alternative products.

### Weaving, tailoring and embroidery centres

At Friendship's vocational training centres disadvantaged women are taught to weave, dye, print and process natural fabrics, enabling them to earn income from products that are marketed in Bangladesh and Europe.

#### Farmers' collectives

Farmers Learning Clubs bring together farmers to exchange knowledge based on practical experience.

#### **ACCESS TO SERVICES**

Lack of access to essential services perpetuates poverty by depriving the ultra-poor of vital assistance and opportunity.

### Access to justice and social support mechanisms

Friendship paralegals assist underserved communities to access government social safety net programmes, employment programmes, and land set aside for the ultra-poor and landless families in need of assistance.

#### Access to markets

Community workers connect farmers and fishermen with traders and ensure they can obtain market information, so that they can sell their produce at a fair price. Training on post-harvest handling and storage enables producers to store their surplus and sell when market prices are favourable.

#### MICRO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Access to finance, combined with adequate capacity building and technical assistance, enhances livelihoods and creates opportunities. Friendship supports small entrepreneurs seeking to start or sustain their businesses or work their way through difficult situations by facilitating financial solutions.





As the world only now starts to recognise the significance and urgency of the climate crisis, Bangladesh has been dealing with its practical implications for many years, finding innovative solutions and adapting work and daily life to be able to survive the impact of climate change. Although Friendship was not founded for the purpose of climate adaptation, in retrospect, almost all of its activities and solutions are directly linked to the challenges arising from the climate crisis.

#### **CLIMATE RESILIENCE**

Bangladesh's location at the mouth of the delta of the Ganges-Brahmaputra river system makes it especially vulnerable to the climate crisis. Recurring floods and cyclones frequently result in poverty, hunger and hopelessness for millions. Friendship helps communities learn how to adapt and build resilience to the impact of climate change.

#### Plinth design and construction

Plinths are cluster villages raised above flood level, designed to reduce loss of life and property during flooding. They provide temporary or prolonged shelter to displaced persons (and their possessions) from the surrounding community.

#### Solar power

Friendship provides remote communities with access to low cost solar-powered lighting. The "solar village" will be a solar micro-grid supplying electricity to more than 100 families—the first of its kind in the chars or river islands, which are completely off the grid.

#### Climate-adaptive agriculture

Repeated floods and tidal surges push farmers into a dangerous cycle of debt and poverty. Friendship helps farmers to adapt by introducing (i) crops that are resistant to floods, drought and salinity (ii) techniques such as floating seed beds, crop diversification and mixed cropping and (iii) alternative products which are better suited to the changed environment.

### Climate compatible rural housing quideline

Friendship has worked with the national government and NGOs to develop a climate compatible standard and guideline for rural housing. All of our buildings interact with their environment to maximise utility and sustainability.



#### **LOCALLY-LED ADAPTATION**

Disaster management committees established by Friendship in coastal and char villages develop strategies to keep the community safe during, and recover after disasters. These committees assess risks, identify needs and develop practical solutions and plans using local knowledge and Friendship's resources.

Emergency response and preparedness awareness is built into Friendship's primary and secondary school curriculum.

Friendship understands that the most effective solutions are created by people who experience problems first-hand and dares to experiment with a new approach. Its ability to listen to insights and incorporate indigenous knowledge is innovative.

If ancient practical local solutions are shared with scientists, policy makers and politicians, this will bring progress and development. Friendship responds to the resilience and creativity of people who have lived for generations under the climatic conditions of this country.

Harry Verweij Netherlands Ambassador in Dhaka



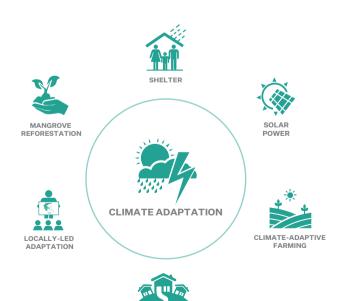


Plinths are cluster villages raised above flood levels, and designed to reduce loss of life and property during flooding.

#### **MANGROVE REFORESTATION**

Mangroves store up to four times more carbon than other types of forests. Friendship's mangrove afforestation programme combines the regenerative effects of mangroves with

their ability to protect landscapes from tidal surges and erosion. Local communities, including caretakers recruited from within them, are closely involved in the management of the forest, and look forward to its economic benefits once the trees mature.



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CLIMATE COMPATIBLE



In seeking to fulfil its mission of strengthening marginalised communities, Friendship has worked over 20 years to create the building blocks of empowerment, nurturing on several levels the essential attributes of dignity and self-confidence and creating opportunities for people to reach their full potential.

#### **EDUCATION**

Access to quality education is essential if communities are to be empowered to transform their lives and reach their full potential. Regular attendance at Friendship schools has a double benefit for the empowerment of adolescent girls, both through the education received and a reduction in the risk of their early marriage.

#### **Primary schools**

The ever-changing landscape and isolation of the chars severely hamper the establishment of school buildings and the willingness of trained teachers to work there. Friendship builds schools that can be rapidly dismantled and rebuilt if necessary and trains local community men and women as teachers who remain within their community.

#### Secondary schools

Friendship developed an innovative solution to the unavailability of secondary level schoolteachers in remote areas thanks to video lessons pre-recorded in Dhaka by highly qualified teachers and screened on solar powered systems. Trained facilitators run the classes and support the students to liaise with the teachers, as necessary.

#### Online lessons

As schools shut down due to the pandemic emergency in 2020, Friendship uploaded its virtual lessons onto a dedicated YouTube platform to help students nationwide to continue their schooling. The lessons were also used nationally on the government's online school portal, and broadcast on state-run television.

#### Adult learning

Adults are taught functional literacy (reading, writing and basic arithmetic) enabling everyday tasks such as reading a signboard or a medicine label, keeping accounts and understanding contracts.



I specially thank Friendship for imparting education to the remote chars of the northern districts of Bangladesh. I have a constituency where there are 13 chars and more than 100,000 people. I would like to see if we can have a Friendship programme in our chars as well. It's very difficult for teachers to go there. Your model could be a beautiful solution.

Dr. Dipu Moni Education Minister, Bangladesh





Attendance at Friendship schools empowers adolescent girls both through the education received and a reduction in the risk of early marriage.

#### Culture

Friendship preserves and documents the ancient technology of building traditional Bengali wooden boats, the oldest craft in Bengal, whose skills have been transmitted orally for over 5,000 years. These boats of the Brahmaputra and Ganges, and the technical knowledge of how they are built, risk disappearing altogether.

Materials developed for use in schools include books designed to spread awareness of Bengali culture, specifically the boat-building tradition and its unique skills.

### AWARENESS OF RIGHTS AND ETHICS

Constitutionally, each citizen has equal rights, but in marginalised communities, they are often deprived of these, or unable to access them.

#### Community paralegals

Friendship Community Paralegals spread awareness of citizens' rights, and ensure these are protected. They also ensure communities can access their rights through the justice system and avail themselves of the government services that they are entitled to.

#### Theatre shows

In areas where literacy levels are generally low, theatre shows are a highly effective and popular means of raising awareness. The enactment of taboo topics (child marriage, dowry, child labour, domestic violence, etc.) conveys valuable information and guidance through popular entertainment.

#### Ethics component in school curriculum

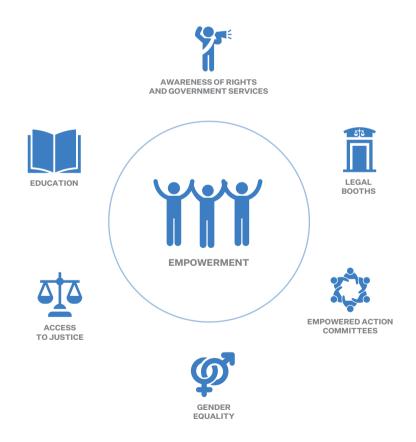
Friendship students are schooled on ethics in addition to their regular curriculum and encouraged to reflect on moral questions. This helps combat the limitations of traditional learning by rote and sets students on the path to become good human beings in future, and also potentially competent leaders.

#### JUSTICE AND GENDER EQUALITY

Although the law contains protections for every citizen against violence and abuse, women in river island communities often live in fear and endure gender-based and other forms of violence due to their inability to access judicial institutions. Friendship's Legal Booths and paralegals enable citizens to have easy and secure access to legal help to combat any infringement of their rights.

### RECRUITMENT FROM WITHIN WORKING COMMUNITIES

Out of the 3,200 people employed by Friendship, nearly two thirds are recruited from within beneficiary communities and trained as medic-aides, teachers, paralegals, skilled birth assistants, solar power technicians, animal health workers, etc. The reliance on these local resources is a major factor of empowerment of these communities.



## THE FRIENDSHIP WAY

#### A SOCIAL PURPOSE ORGANISATION

Friendship's role in beneficiary communities is that of an instigator and facilitator of lasting and meaningful change in a way that ensures dignity, opportunity and hope for the people, and that is permanent and sustainable. The value of its work is intended to grow, rather than diminish in the future, regardless of the continued presence of the organisation. Friendship therefore views itself as a Social Purpose Organisation (SPO), an organisation that addresses social issues by prioritising in all instances the interests of the communities it serves.

By adopting a model that puts people at the centre of its planning and action, Friendship is able to maximise its efforts within communities and pioneer a new paradigm in the development ecosystem.

#### **VALUES DRIVEN**

Integrity, dignity, quality, justice and hope are the five values at the core of Friendship's work.

Based on a well-defined Code of Ethics, these values are communicated systematically throughout the organisation and applied consistently at all levels of Friendship's activities. The Code of Ethics sets out 12 ethical concepts, one for each month of the year. The ethic of the month is presented to all Friendship employees, discussed at the beginning of all community group meetings and included in the curriculum of Friendship schools.

The fact that Friendship consistently applies its values in practice by no means constrains or limits its action. On the contrary it fuels the organisation's action and is key to its success.

#### **NEEDS BASED**

Friendship's focus is on addressing the most critical needs of those who are left behind due to challenges posed by a disconnect from the mainstream. The unique geographies, distinct challenges and extreme conditions faced by these communities mean that a one-sizefits-all strategy cannot work. Because experience shows that the actual needs of a community are best identified by its members, Friendship supports local communities in identifying their main issues as well as finding and implementing sustainable solutions. As a result, time and money are not wasted on projects or services that may be wellintentioned, or indeed might be effective elsewhere, but are not suitable for local circumstances

Friendship has a fantastically streamlined organisation. Professionalism and compassion go hand in hand. It is impressive that Friendship supports communities structurally on a very large scale, offering everything from healthcare to education, economic development and beyond.





Solar power technicians trained by Friendship ensure remote communities that are off the national power grid have access to electricity.

#### PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH

Friendship's working communities are actively involved in all phases of the project cycle and many of their members play key roles by serving their communities after having been trained as teachers, community health workers, paralegals, solar power technicians, animal health workers, flood volunteers or cyclone-preparedness volunteers.

Such direct participation ensures community ownership and effective collaboration. It is essential to success by enabling skills and knowledge to be generated and retained within the communities. As a result of effective participation and the consistent provision of quality services, Friendship has earned the trust of the communities in which it operates. In turn, this trust and reputation for reliability has helped create the basis for a strong rapport with local government authorities.

There is no doubt that the process of observing, listening, understanding, involving, designing, piloting and adjusting, which Friendship adopts throughout every intervention cycle has been key to its success in creating lasting impact.

### INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Friendship's interventions are designed to enable vulnerable communities to thrive, using their grass roots knowledge to identify solutions that are suitable to their circumstances. As challenges faced by those communities are multi-faceted and interlinked, Friendship has developed integrated solutions—as opposed to isolated projects—that allow each action to be fully effective and to unfold its full potential.

For example, poverty can only be reduced if people remain healthy and are well educated. Education cannot be promoted successfully if students are hungry or have to miss school to earn income for their families. A healthcare system will not flourish in the absence of awareness of good hygiene and a water and sanitation system. Economic improvement can only be achieved if people have access to training and finance. Finally, improvements cannot be sustained if the results of people's efforts are regularly destroyed by natural disasters.

Recognising that action designed to fulfil one basic need may not be effective if a different need is not addressed simultaneously, Friendship consistently implements a model of integrated development combining Health, Education, Climate Action, Inclusive Citizenship, Sustainable Economic Development and Cultural Preservation.



At Friendship's vocational training centres disadvantaged women are taught to weave, dye, print and process natural fabrics that are marketed in Bangladesh and Europe.

#### **ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET**

Friendship increases the chances of success and sustainability of its programmes by applying an entrepreneurial approach to finding the right solutions. Working in partnership with people from the corporate world, sharing best practices and high standards of corporate management has been a key success factor. It has allowed Friendship to be innovative, and to design quality solutions, services and economic models that can be replicable and sustainable in the long term.

Friendship's entrepreneurial approach also helps to build the confidence of donors, as it produces efficient solutions, optimises the use of resources and maximises the impact of their donations.

A significant portion of the Friendship staff recruited from within the communities, such as medic-aides and solar power technicians, operate partly or fully on a microentrepreneurship model so that, upon being adequately trained, they can generate additional income for themselves by providing innovative additional services within their communities

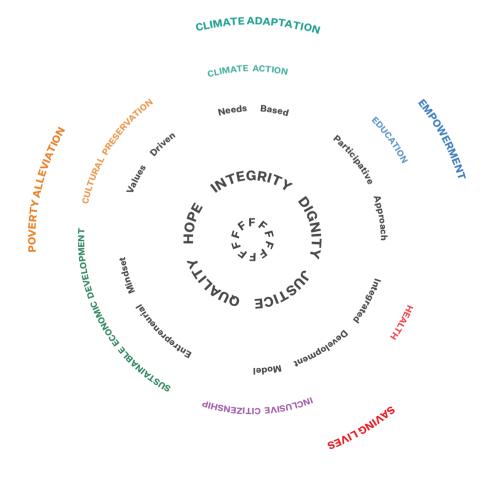
#### A TRULY INTERNATIONAL TEAM

Three years after Friendship started operations in Bangladesh, its founder took steps to set up a network of supporting entities in Europe—now under the banner of Friendship International—in order to establish the closest possible contacts with private and public donors.

Friendship International helps develop long-term relationships with funding partners who understand and support Friendship's core principles and support its projects. It is, however, not only a source of financial resources, but constitutes a unique platform for exchanging skills and ideas, and a team of experts who share the organisation's values and principles.

The national boards of the Friendship International entities are rooted in their respective national ecosystems and facilitate direct contact between donors, the organisation and the programmes in Bangladesh.

As a result, Friendship is able to continue to act according to its own principles and objectives, relying upon intermediary organisations only when there is a close match of goals and agendas.



#### THE WAY FORWARD

### CONTINUITY, GROWTH AND SCALE

In line with its approach over the last 20 years, Friendship will always seek as a priority to ensure continuity of the support it provides to the communities it serves, while adapting its interventions to their changing needs and capabilities.

Continued growth merely for growth's sake is not Friendship's driving force, but growth permits scaling. Scale is a factor of credibility and thus critical to the achievement of our objectives. So, Friendship will not resist growth as additional needs are identified and opportunities to meet these arise. The experience of recent years has shown that where the organisation delivers effective services and creates lasting impact, while entertaining relations of trust with its beneficiaries, donors and government authorities, it will attract additional support allowing it to scale its interventions. Friendship is determined to ensure that growth will not hamper the quality of its work or its underlying fundamental values.

#### SHARING A PROVEN MODEL

Over the last 20 years, Friendship has developed a set of solutions that have worked sustainably in geographic areas where, because of their remoteness and isolation, other willing agencies have struggled to address challenges successfully. These solutions have proven their effectiveness in diverse geographies and socio-economic conditions, such as the river islands in North Bengal, the coastal areas in the south, or the Rohingya refugee camps.

Friendship's strong track record over many years provides a persuasive narrative for the adoption of its methods by others. Friendship will increase its efforts to demonstrate the effectiveness of its integrated development model so that it—or elements of it—can be replicated on a larger scale and integrated into the systems of public service delivery by government and private stakeholders such as development agencies, other NGOs or foundations. The Government of Bangladesh has always been a close partner, and it is intended to continue to strengthen that collaboration.



Friendship's working communities are actively involved in all phases of the project cycle and many of their members play key roles by serving their communities



Friendship's working communities are actively involved in all phases of the project cycle and many of their members play key roles by serving their communities.

#### A VOICE FOR THE UNHEARD

Also, Friendship will increase its efforts to give a voice, and whenever possible, access to additional resources, to smaller, local NGOs which, while working closely with remote communities, often find it difficult to make themselves heard and receive the support they deserve. The first conclusive initiatives in that direction have already been developed in close cooperation with the Bangladesh Ministry for Disaster Management and Relief and will be scaled up in the coming months and years.

### SHARING CLIMATE ADAPTATION SOLUTIONS

In the same line of thought, Friendship will become increasingly involved as a voice from the field in forums whose objective it is to advance adaptation solutions to Climate Change, All projects and programmes of Friendship have been conceived and developed, by necessity, to be adapted to the requirements of a heavily climate affected environment. Whereas Friendship's programmes were largely conceived at times when "climate change" was not a widely known theme and its long-term implications hardly realised, their very characteristics are such that they contribute to strengthening social, environmental and economic resilience of rural poor communities which are highly vulnerable to adverse climatic events. Sharing this experience in forums where the voices from the front line are too often underrepresented will be at the centre of Friendship's efforts.

#### THE GREEN CLIMATE FUND

Another related key objective will be to access resources for itself and other local organisations from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) put in place by the UN in 2010.

It is largely recognized that if the GCF is to achieve its goals, it will need urgently and significantly to facilitate access to its funding for grassroots organisations. Indeed, while the GCF is committed to providing balanced support for climate change mitigation and adaptation, adaptation projects have until now been largely underfunded and the final beneficiaries—the most exposed and vulnerable people—have only received a minimal share of the funds, most of which is diluted at intermediate levels.

### FRIENDSHIP UNIVERSITY—DREAM OR REALITY?

Finally, there is a dream of opening a Friendship University, the realisation of which would bring together years of innovation, hard work and linkages of soft and hard skills that have enabled success to happen. The goal is to create a university for climate and development studies, embodying Friendship's ethics and values—an ethics driven university enriching human character and dealing with the most challenging crises of the day. With the multiple challenges it has faced, Bangladesh has been a forum for innovators, a laboratory for development and there is much to learn from the adaptation solutions it has brought forth.

#### **GOVERNANCE**

#### **GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES**

Operating as an international organisation in Bangladesh, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, Friendship strives to be exemplary in all matters of governance. Each member entity of Friendship International is governed by its own board of directors or trustees and, as a registered NGO or charitable entity, is subject to the requirements of the relevant authority in its home country. These include filing annual financial statements which are reviewed or audited by independent examiners. In Bangladesh, Friendship's Internal Audit function reports to the Board of Directors. In addition, individual programmes may be audited by external auditors or evaluators commissioned by those who fund them. Friendship extends its full support to any such missions.

Friendship International has developed guidelines for its Code of Conduct and key policies to be applied across the organisation, including policies on such matters as safeguarding, risk management and anti-money laundering. These policies and the code of conduct are amplified as necessary to give detailed guidance on best practice at all levels of activity from the boardrooms through head office in Dhaka to the remotest villages in Friendship's operating areas.

#### TRANSPARENCY

The implementation of Friendship's policies and practices are underwritten by a 100% commitment to transparency, which is evidenced by:

- open communication through the website
- publicly available annual activity reports
- publication of audited financial statements
- · audit of individual programmes
- external evaluation of programmes and publication of the reports
- an intense programme of visits by donors to operations in the field

Friendship has zero tolerance of corruption and has adapted its approach and implemented procedures to mitigate the risk of corruption. Full transparency and open communication within the communities served by Friendship through billboards, leaflets and mobile phone are an example of how integrity is assured by enabling the beneficiaries to see for themselves that they receive the full benefit of services available to them.



During the Covid-19 crisis Friendship delivered 2.8 million person-days of emergency food aid to families worst affected by lockdowns.



A Friendship School Management Committee meets during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the closure of physical school buildings, teachers continued lessons through telecommunications and home visits.

#### **INTEGRITY**

The key value of integrity forms the foundation of Friendship's approach to governance. Its importance is communicated consistently throughout the organisation and applied at all levels of Friendship's activities. Friendship promotes integrity through its Code of Ethics which is used in training its own personnel, as well as in training applied in Friendship's schools, clinics, hospitals and beneficiary groups.

Also in place are behavioural guidelines for visiting health teams and doctors as well as interns and visitors to Friendship's operating areas to ensure that they are aware of expectations in areas of particular sensitivity.

#### **POLICIES**

Friendship applies a set of clear and well-maintained policies and guidelines related to financial management, human and other resource management, procurement, equality and other relevant aspects of organisational governance.

Detailed policies and procedures cover such matters as:

- child protection
- · anti-corruption
- complaint and feedback management (whistleblowing)
- · sexual harassment and bullying
- procurement
- environment protection
- gender
- media
- finance
- human resources

The entire Friendship organisation deserves our deepest gratitude for the extraordinary lesson of resilience and solidarity that you have shown over the years. Friendship has taken up all the new challenges as they have arisen throughout its history, whether they be natural disasters or those caused directly by men. Under the most adverse conditions, it succeeds in reinventing itself with an unshakeable faith in its mission, with talent, assiduity and optimism.

Pierre Ahlborn Chief Executive Officer, Banque de Luxembourg



# WHAT WE OFFER AND WHAT WE NEED

by MARC ELVINGER

Co-Chair Friendship International



#### Our offer

As awareness grows not only at the level of governments, but also among civil society organisations, individuals and corporates, of the need to take responsibility and to contribute towards combatting some of the most pressing challenges facing humanity Friendship offers an effective means of converting awareness and desire to provide support into action.

Friendship is funded primarily in the form of grants and donations from individuals, foundations, corporates and institutional donors such as governments and international organisations. Our long-term partnerships with a diverse range of funders have been key to our success in ensuring the sustainability of our programmes and in scaling these significantly over the years. They also demonstrate that our partners have found that Friendship delivers on its promises to undertake the effective socially responsible action that they demand.

When our donors and partners are asked for their views on Friendship's strengths, or differentiating competencies, their answers most frequently revolve around:

- excellence in execution
- locally embedded leadership and empowerment of local personnel and communities
- · ensuring cost-effectiveness and
- consistent adherence to a set of strong values

It is fair to say that this demonstrates the strong alignment of our partners with the goals and values that have driven Friendship's operations over 20 years.

We encourage our partners (and prospective partners) to visit our programmes in the field, so that they can see at first hand the impact generated by their support and be assured that we consistently adhere to our fundamental values while using our precious resources with great care, transparency and effectiveness. We provide all the logistical support required to make field visits a unique experience, both personally and professionally. Very often, our visitors tell us that seeing really is believing.

#### Our needs

Whereas an increasing portion of Friendship's overall budget is contributed by institutional funders—an evolution that reflects an ever-growing recognition of the effectiveness of our operations—contributions from private partners constitute an indispensable element of Friendship's funding structure. On the one hand because in many cases institutional funding is conditional upon private co-funding. On the other hand, private funders typically enjoy more flexibility in the allocation of their contributions, thus allowing us to bridge gaps, address new needs or support the launch of innovative initiatives.

Building reserves is a true challenge for an organisation like ours, considering that donors mostly expect their contributions to be allocated immediately to create impact in the field, as opposed to being set aside in view of future—and as yet undetermined—needs. A certain proportion of non-earmarked resources however allows Friendship to progressively build up the reserves necessary to secure the continuity of programmes in case of temporary funding gaps or respond swiftly to an emergency, such as a natural disaster or the initial days of the Rohingya refugee crisis.



In 2021 Friendship launches a solar power grid supplying electricity to 100 households. These schoolkids will be able to study under bright light late into the evening.

Recognising that many of our partners have unique sets of experience and skills, we are extremely keen also to benefit from non-financial support, such as help in capacity building for our staff, sharing of best practices, or strengthening of monitoring and evaluation processes. Our teams value such in-kind "skill sponsorships" as a unique opportunity to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our work.

We also welcome a wide range of volunteers, core to our culture of friendship, in addition to being a factor of cost efficiency. Most visible are the large number of specialised foreign doctors and other medical staff volunteers in and on board our hospitals; in addition, many young interns from abroad join Friendship for assignments of several months in Bangladesh. Our European entities, with relatively limited staff members, rely extensively on volunteers, many of whom are highly qualified. And finally -and this sometimes goes unnoticed—there are hundreds of volunteers in Bangladesh who form the backbone of many of our emergency and relief operations, particularly in times of cyclones and floods.

Whereas Friendship is primarily grant funded, whenever the context allows for it, we seek to diversify our resources by introducing income generating components into our programmes. While our micro-finance activities and textile production are most naturally geared towards achieving financial self-sustainability, part of our health infrastructure and related services in the southern coastal belt have also, for some time, been capable of covering at least part of their cost.

An entrepreneurial mindset leads us to be constantly on the lookout for additional possibilities to diversify Friendship's income sources. However we must never lose sight of the fact that our ultimate goal is not to create a financially self-sustainable organisation but to strengthen marginalised communities, and empower people to transform their lives and reach their full potential.

Friendship's budget for 2021 stands at around 16 million euros, of which approximately ten million are allocated to our regular development programmes and six million to our humanitarian aid programmes in the context of the Rohingya refugee crisis and other emergencies. Because unaddressed needs remain enormous in our working areas and because our programmes are easily replicable, and thus scalable, we are always looking for additional funding and new partners.

**Marc Elvinger** 

Co-Chair of Friendship International February 2021

#### FRIENDSHIP AT A GLANCE



6,500,000+

people have access to Friendship's health services.



8,300,000+

person-days of emergency aid have been distributed.



315,000+

people benefit from Inclusive Citizenship programmes every year.



108,000+

people have benefitted from Sustainable Economic Development programmes.



481,000+

people have visited Friendship's exhibitions on the traditional Boats of Bengal.



+000,08

people have access to safe water from six water plants in coastal saline areas.



23,000+

students have studied at Friendship's schools and learning centres.\*

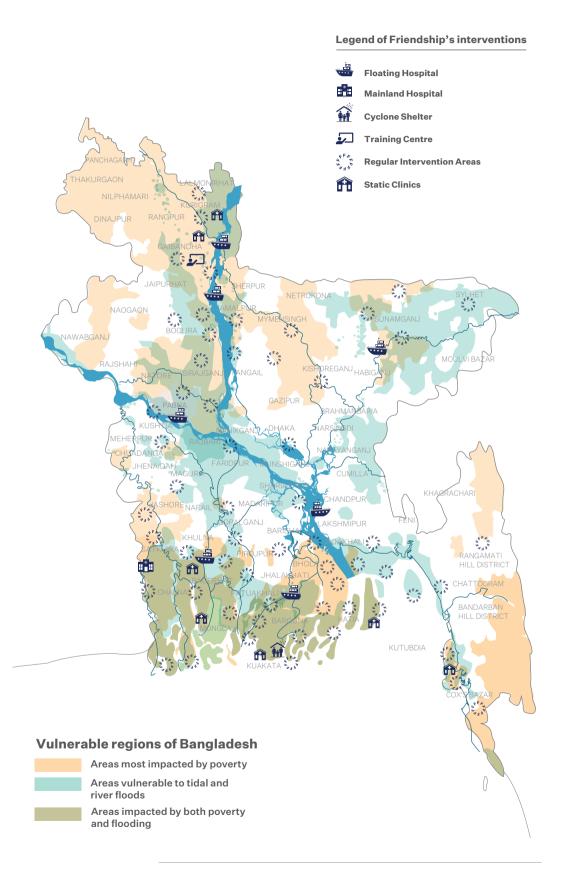


3,200+

employees of whom two thirds are from the communities served by Friendship

<sup>\*</sup>These figures are accurate as of January 2021

### INTERVENTION AREAS JUXTAPOSED OVER POVERTY-STRICKEN AND CLIMATE IMPACTED REGIONS OF BANGLADESH\*



<sup>\*</sup>The programmes shown on this map include five floating hospitals anticipated to be inaugurated in 2021.

They exclude emergency projects responding to the Rohingya and Covid-19 crises.



#### www.friendship.ngo

Friendship is registered as a charity in Bangladesh. It is also registered as such in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

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