

Blue Gold Program success story

Blue Gold Program enhancing women's leadership

Context

Very few women in Blue Gold Program (BGP) polder communities held leadership positions before BGP started in 2013. A 2017 study found that in polders where BGP had recently started operations, both men and women considered leadership for women as unattainable.

On the contrary, in polders where BGP had worked for 3-4 years, women's leadership had become more acceptable. By end 2019, acceptance of women's leadership had increased also in the 'new' polders, and women indeed occupied more leadership positions. How was this change achieved?

Blue Gold approach to women and leadership

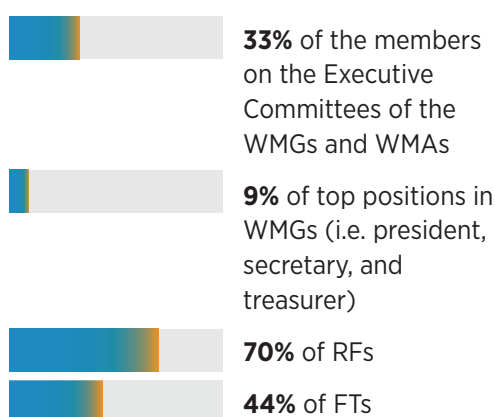
- Emphasise that women can participate in BGP activities on equal footing with men
- Consider men and women as equals, e.g. in training sessions
- Provide knowledge and skills to men and women. 'Knowledge is power' also applies to women
- Identify women with talent and potential as candidates for leadership positions and who can become role models for others
- Offer special support and encouragement to women
- Conduct activities such as gender Courtyard Sessions (CYS), gender and leadership training, and other training and events promoting women's empowerment

In particular, Blue Gold promoted women's leadership in positions such as Executive Committee member of Water Management Groups (WMGs) and Water Management Associations (WMAs), as Resource farmers (RFs) and Farmer Trainers (FTs), and as entrepreneurs such as input suppliers and vaccinators.

Results

Participation in Blue Gold activities triggered the interest of many women. Women started to realise that they can also take up initiatives and fill leadership positions.

Women leadership positions directly promoted by Blue Gold



Changes at the end of Blue Gold

- There are now more women in leadership positions and they are more self-confident than before
- Women in leadership positions within WMGs and WMAs are now more vocal, active, and confident than they were at the outset of Blue Gold



Spin-off: opportunities for higher-level leadership positions

Women who perform well as leaders at the local level use their experience to take opportunities for higher-level leadership positions, such as those in Union Parishads (UPs). A number of female Farmer Trainers were offered better jobs, and a few women leaders grew in the role of conflict resolution.

In the 2016 UP elections, 25 women were elected in the Blue Gold area who had developed their leadership experience as WMG Executive Committee members.



- Men accept women leaders better now, and more readily acknowledge their qualities
- Men and women leaders engage in more cooperation and joint decision-making
- Women have increased their mobility, and now contact and collaborate with local government, such as Union Parishads (UPs) and even Upazilas

Hosnara Rina's story

In 2014, Rina became a member of the Amkhola WMG in polder 43/2B, Pathuakhali. She attended gender courtyard sessions, which helped her realise the importance of women's leadership and joint decision-making in her WMG. She was eventually elected Secretary of the WMG Executive Committee. Rina actively participated in decision-making about water management and other WMG matters.

Due to her leadership and decision-making ability, WMG members motivated her to participate in the 2016 Union Parishad (UP) elections. She won, with 4,500 more votes than her competitor. Now, she plays a vital role as a female UP member. She also functions as Panel Chairman, replacing the UP Chairman in his absence

Sabina Yesmin Moyna's story

Moyna joined the Gulshakhali WMG in polder 43/2F in Patuakhali under a previous project. When Blue Gold activities started, she was elected for a position on the Executive Committee of her WMG. She is now Vice President and involved in water

management decision-making. In her position as a leader, Moyna became aware of the many barriers faced by women in her community. She now actively promotes women's participation in training and in productive work, and in raising their voice, e.g. on issues such as stopping early marriage.

The community has noted her commitment to women's empowerment, and supported her to become a female UP member, where she is now also panel chairperson. Moyna is now recognised by women and men as a trusted leader.

Parveen's story

Parveen once lived in poverty with her husband, a construction worker. Parveen earned some income as a tailor. In 2017, she joined the new Solua WMG in polder 25 in Khulna and was elected Joint Secretary. She also motivated other people to join as members. She became a Resource Farmer (RF) for poultry, promoting improved technologies and the collective purchase of feed. She took initiatives for women to engage in In-polder Water Management (IPWM) activities such as cleaning water hyacinths, constructing a cross-bundh and engaging in sluice operation and maintenance (O&M).

Parveen is a fighter who became a leader. She is now invited by educational institutions as a chief guest for inspirational speeches.



Women's interest in leadership roles

When asked why they took leadership positions, women commonly mention their motivation to contribute to the development of their community, especially supporting the women in their community. The creation of women's leadership positions, such as in Water Management Groups, as Resources Farmers or as Farmer Trainers, encouraged women with hidden talents and ambitions to pursue such opportunities.

