

Report on pilot joint UP-BGP workshops on Women's Empowerment

Satkhira, 1 and 3 October, 2018

1. Background of the workshop:

Half of the population of the Blue Gold project area are women, who are often little involved in income generating activities (or productivity increase) and lack power. To better achieve the objectives of BGP, both men and women need to have the opportunity to contribute to increased (agricultural) production and productivity -as this will raise the total production and reduces poverty- and participate in decision-making -as this will lead to better decisions. This will also contribute to the empowerment of women and more gender equality, which is in line with the policy of the Government of Bangladesh, including the local governments such as the Union Parishads, and Blue Gold's results framework.

Because in practice, the potential of women still remains more under-used than men's, this pilot workshop focused on increasing women's potential and empowerment. The target women (30 per workshop) were those women WMG members who are from the poorer sections and/or destitute¹, and who did not had earlier opportunity to participate in other BGP activities, such as FFS. However, they all had at least a small piece of homestead land. Selection was by the concerned WMG presidents.

2. Objective of the workshops:

Women's empowerment through utilizing women's potential and locally available resources, in particular local government services (e.g. from UP) and BGP support.

The workshops are joined efforts of the concerned UP and BGP, also sharing the budget, with the UP responsible for logistics and providing presentations about their facilities and services as available for the target women. BGP took the initiative, and participated in the facilitation of the workshop.

Two workshops were held²:



¹ From the so-called "hanging-in" households

² A third similar workshop will be held in Khulna, probably in November 2018.

1. On Monday 1 October at Budhata UP, Satkhira, with 28 women participants of 2 WMGs (Beula Nayiber Khal WMG and Lanbaranga Zamirer Khal WMG);
2. On Wednesday 3 October at Fingri UP, Satkhira, with 30 women participants of 3 WMGs (Morichap, Goshkhali khal and Koikhali khal), 10 women from each WMG.



3. Process and programme of the workshops:

The workshop idea was developed in coordination with the concerned Union Parishads and BGP TA, also sharing the costs of the workshops. The UPs have a budget for women's empowerment.

Before the workshop, Focus Group Discussions were conducted with the invited workshop participants. These FGDs collected some basic information on the characteristics of the workshop participants, assessed their interest in especially homestead vegetable cultivation and discussed their current empowerment situation (or rather: lack of empowerment). The findings from the FGDs are attached as an annex.

The program for the two workshops was very similar and is annexed to this report. It can be summarized as follows:

1. Welcome speech and overview of BGP by BGP Zonal Coordinator
2. Inauguration speech by UP Chairman
3. Introduction of participants by workshop facilitator (by polder co-coordinator)
4. Background and objective of the workshop (Gender Expert)
5. Session on women's empowerment, including group work on opportunities and challenges and plenary discussion on how to overcome challenges, led by BGP Gender Coordinator;
6. Session by Upazila Women's Affairs Officer
7. Session by UP representative on opportunities for women at UP level (not in Buddhata due to sickness of the UP representative)
8. Identification of group leaders and discussion of Action Plan, facilitated by zonal Socio-economist (in Budhhata) and Zonal Coordinator (in Fingri).
9. Distribution of inputs (vegetable seeds)
10. Closing, including feedback from the participants.

The overall facilitation of the two workshops was by Farzana, assisted by the concerned CDFs.

4. Findings from the two workshops

4.1 Session on women's empowerment

For the workshop participants the concept of women's empowerment was totally new. The women themselves were holding the view that it is normal that women do not participate in decision-making, that money is handled by men only and that women do all domestic and care work, even if she, like her husband, spends many hours in doing agricultural work. Discussing options such as joint decision-making, women handling money and sharing domestic work with male family members were an eye-opener to them. On the one hand, they see this as a dream, but they also observed that raising such issues in front of their husbands might lead to anger or even domestic violence. They agreed that economic empowerment of women (i.e. contributing to income generation) is key to increase their status in the family and community.



The group work identified the following **opportunities** for women's (economic) empowerment:

- They have own homestead land that they can use for vegetable cultivation, poultry keeping, goat or cow rearing, selling cow milk and cow dung;
- Tailoring, small business, selling leaves of medical Bashok leaves trees or making paper bags;
- They have some skills and knowledge, including already some practical experience on vegetable cultivation;
- Some of them already received some training on vegetable cultivation, or have neighbours who participated in FFS (04 from Budhata & 3 from Fingri (participated in FFS); in addition, attending training of different organisations is also seen as an opportunity.

Challenges to women's empowerment identified by the workshop participants:

- Among some women there is lack of interest in empowerment and/or barriers imposed by the family and society to become empowered;
- They are overloaded with household work and have "time poverty";
- There is a social barrier for increasing their mobility;
- They have limited scope for income generating activities and/or lack (access to) money for investments in IGAs; they do not own assets;
- They lack information on marketing and do not know improved technologies / agricultural practices;
- They have no right to speak out and voice their opinion; as a female family member they are being ignored;
- They are not involved in decision-making because men think that women do not have the knowledge and capacity to do so.

During a plenary session it was discussed **how challenges can be overcome**:

- Reduce domestic work (by help of male family members), but become more involved in income generation
- Get a loan and/or information about the selected income generation eg from local NGOs

- Get to know the market price by linkages with traders / input suppliers
- Maintain linkages with local organisations, increase communication and knowledge;
- Become more involved in family decision-making processes by increased communication, skills and knowledge, also applying improved technologies.

4.2 Session by Upazila Women's Affairs Officer

In both workshops the Upazila Women's Affairs Officer of Satkhira Upazila (Ms. Fatematoj Johora) held a session about women's issues, including about what empowerment means, stressing that money earned by women's vegetable cultivation is their own money and women have a say in how to spend such money. She also addressed domestic work, in particular the absence of recognition of the value of such work. In particular, she presented the support available from the Upazila for women, including:



- VGD cards for vulnerable women and VDF cards for lactating mothers;
- Support available for orphans;
- Available helplines for all people in Bangladesh (109 for domestic violence; 999 for any emergency; and 106 for corruption incidents);
- In Budhhata the women also presented their main problems to her, such as lack of safe drinking water (they have to walk 2 km now), lack of electricity (though most have solar energy) and poor roads.

4.3 Seed provider

A local seed trader presented himself and shared his telephone number.

4.4 Discussion of the action plan and seed distribution

Before the action plan was discussed, group leaders were identified:

- Nazma khatun .. for the women of Beula WMG
- Halima khatun ... for the women of Lanba danga ranga WMG
- Rajashori Sarker... for the women of Ghoshkhal WMG
- Khrisna Ray Chowdhury for the women of Morichap WMG and
- Rahima Begum for the women of Koikhali WMG.



The action plan is about how the women will use the inputs distributed to them (vegetable seeds) and consists of a time schedule for the different activities, from land preparation, fencing and

seeding to how they can know the market price and selling the produce by themselves, with as a last step the planning for the next crop. It was discussed that if the women are satisfied with the production, they will buy improved seeds themselves for the next season.

4.5 Impression of the workshops

Feedback from the participants

The reaction of the women participants was very positive. In the Budhhata workshop the women were happy and said that they learned how they can empower themselves by increasing their capacity, skills and knowledge. They also said that women's empowerment will be very important because male family members now dominate in spending and decision-making. There was also a request for a follow-up workshop on women's empowerment. In the Fingri workshop, the women said that they learned many new things, including that they are a human being in their own right ("manush") like men, and not only someone's daughter, wife and mother, and they also have the right to take decisions. They realized that they can do things for their own, which is also to the benefit of their family and country. They will share what they learned from the workshop with all WMG general members. Also the Fingri women would appreciate more similar workshops.



Conclusions by the participating Blue Gold TA:

These were very useful workshops, also because for most participating women this was the first workshop or training they attended. For them the workshop was about "their life history" in the sense that the traditional roles of them as women were discussed, including recognizing their important role in domestic work. It was an eye-opener for them to learn that the role of women can also be different, such as husband and wife sharing decision-making and domestic work. This workshop challenged their ideas that doing something for your own as a woman is a bad thing. By using homestead vegetable cultivation as an entry point, this workshop is expected to contribute to increased vegetable production and income and also contribute to more women's (economic) empowerment.

Another positive aspect was the fact that this was a workshop jointly organised by BGP TA with the concerned UP chairmen, also involving the WMGs (presidents did the selection of the participants) and also the Upazila Women Affairs Officer. The budget was shared by the UPs and Blue Gold³.

4.6 Follow-up on the workshops and impact assessment

After the second workshop, the gender team and the zonal / polder coordinators communicated about the follow-up of these two workshops. The following was agreed:

1. The Action Plans for Budhhata and Fingri will be typed out at the zonal office and shared with the group leaders and WMG president CDF & SAAOs and with Roksana (within one week after the workshops).

³ It had been agreed in Fingri that the UP would pay for the lunch and for the transport costs of the women. However, at the end, they did not do the latter.

2. The CDF will regularly (bi-weekly?) check the progress of implementation of the Action Plan, in particular by monitoring and providing assist where needed.
3. The polder team will also follow-up on the sharing of the workshop learnings with others, especially the WMG general membership.
4. The Polder Coordinator will overview the progress and report on the implementation of the Action Plan, and share with the zonal coordinator & gender coordinator / gender team.
5. The gender coordinator will especially assess the impact of the workshop on the empowerment of the participants, including the use of the income, e.g. once the first vegetables have been harvested (about 3 months after the workshops).

Annexes:

1. Findings from two FGDs in Fingri and Buddhata
2. Detailed program of the two workshops

Annex 1 Need analysis among workshop participants through Focus Group Discussion to know the women's situation on empowerment

Venue: (i) Goshkali WMG in Fingri UP (FGD held on Saturday September 29) and (ii) Lambadanga WMG in Buddhata UP (FGD held on Sunday September 30), polder 2, Satkhira

Two FGD sessions were conducted with the selected participants for the two women empowerment workshops. In Goshkhali they were from 3 WMGs (Goshkhali Khal WMG, Morichap WMG and Koikhali Khal WMG) and in Lambadanga from 2 WMGs (Lambadanga Zamirer Khal WMG and Beula Nayeber Khal WMG). At Goshkhali a total of 34 participants were present, of whom 10 participants were women household heads (widows, separated or divorced). At Lambadanga 22 participants were present, with only one of them being a *de facto* female household head (with a chronically sick husband). Because both groups were big, some questions were usually asked to be answered by the women of one specific WMG.

Most of the women of Goskhali WMG have a homestead area between 5-7 decimal, in Koikhali this is 1-5 decimal, in Morichap 2-7 decimal, in Lambadanga 5-10 decimal and in Beula 7-10 decimal. A total of 80% of all FGD participants are involved in homestead vegetable cultivation; 35% of the women also cultivated vegetables on adjacent land, also through traditional way and they fulfill their family demand. 20 of the 30 women of the Goshkhali FGD also sell some vegetables from their homestead to paiker, but it is their husband who contacts the paiker (holds his telephone number) and takes the money (only one woman keeps money to herself). If vegetables are sold at the market, the husband will do this. Last year the women from both FGD groups cultivated bottle gourd, okra, red amaranth, sweet gourd; 18 of the 30 women in Goshkhali FDG did all cultivation activities on their own; in Buddhata all women did this.

The mobility of the women is limited and they are not allowed to go to the market. These women are not empowered about decision making and crop selling and spending money for earning income. But many women think that it is reality that husbands have all power and take all decisions.

11 women out of 34 in the Goshkhali FGD mainly work by selling their labor as wage labourers. They feel deprived because they receive considerable lower wages for wage labour than men: in robi season women get 120 taka and men get 200 taka for the same work; in the Aman season men get 400 and women get 250 taka. In the Buddhata FGD wages of 250 taka for men and 150 for women were mentioned (for work in the morning). The FGD participants realize that this is discrimination. At the same time, they are not allowed to spend the money that they earned. Their husbands take all their earnings and take decisions about the spending.

The women who sell their wage labour are over-loaded due to their domestic work. But it is their opinion that "domestic work is always meant to be done by women and not by men". They see this as a rule in our society and they are not interested to discuss with their husbands to share the domestic work, also fearing for a violent reaction of their husbands if they would raise this issue in front of them. In Buddhata the women even said that husbands cannot do domestic work as they are too sensitive; but women have a lot of tolerance and they can sacrifice themselves.

As their requirement of the vegetable seeds for homestead cultivation they mentioned: red amaranth, sweet gourd, okra, bitter gourd and bottle gourd (year round seeds).

Annex 2: Workshop Schedule for the joint Women Empowerment Workshop UP – BGP

BANGLADESH WATER DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Blue Gold Program

Workshop on Women empowerment

Venue: Budhata Union Parishad (on 1 October 2018) and Fingri Union Parishad (on 3 October 2018)

Workshop Schedule

Date & time	Topic	Contents	Methodology	Facilitator
10.00-10.20	Welcome	Welcome speech& overview of the BGP	Speech	Zonal coordinator
10.20-10.35	Inauguration	Inauguration speech and opening		UP chairman
10.35-11.00	Ice breaking & Course opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction with each other Objective and background of the workshop 	Participatory & PPT	Farzana Kitty & Zonal coordinator
11.00- 11.15	Tea Break			
11.15-12.15	Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowerment and Women empowerment Possible scope of involvement of Women in agriculture for women empowerment Opportunities and challenges for women empowerment Overcome the way of challenges 	Large group discussion and group work PPT	Roksana
12.15-12-45	Gov. Services & support at UZ	Different Gov. Services & Support at UZ are available	Large group discussion	Women affairs officer
12.45 -1.15	Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What type of opportunity at UP for women How can we use the opportunities 		UP Representative
1.15-2.00	Lunch Break			
2.00-2.30	Open discussion	Open discussion	Participatory	Roksana
2.30-3.00	Action plan	Action plan	Group work	Mohibullah
3.00 -3.45pm	Input distribution & closing	Input distribution & Closing		UP Chairman & Zonal coordinator