



Blue Gold Program success story

Feminisation of agriculture, women's workload and sharing domestic work

Context

Until only recently, it was common in farming households in the polder areas for work to be strictly divided according to gender. Men worked in the fields, and women attended to domestic tasks, post-harvest work, and homestead production. Women's productive work was typically not valued, and considered part of domestic work.

Demands for increased labour

“Before BGP, we worked 2 hours a day, at most, in any kind of agricultural work. Now, it can be up to 6 hours per day, especially during aman and boro cultivation peak periods.” - BGP female farmer

BGP interventions resulted in increased cropping areas, increased cropping intensity with more crops being produced each year, and increased yields and homestead production. This led to an increased need for labour, bringing forth a change in the roles of women in agriculture.

- Women are engaged more in the production process in rice fields, a role previously only filled by men
- Improved water management has led to increased production of rabi crops. Women often provide all labour in the production of these crops
- Women's work in homestead food production, including poultry and livestock rearing and vegetable cultivation, increased
- Women are more involved in fisheries, especially in feeding prawn and fish, as a result of expanded aquaculture.

Women now also cultivate vegetables on pond dykes

- More women are engaged in the daily management of agricultural activities and marketing
- An increase in demand for wage labour has resulted in more available work for women from landless households

“Women do more wage labour work than men, as they are cheaper, but they do the same amount of work per day as men.” - BGP female farmer

Results

- Women are proud that they contribute to increased production and family incomes. Their work has diversified into a broader range of tasks
- Women's total workload, however, has increased, often at the cost of leisure time and rest. They now often suffer from exhaustion, sleep deprivation, and physical strains, especially in peak seasons
- Men's workloads have also increased, but they do not suffer from similar issues relating to overwork, as they work less hours than women
- Domestic work and care work remain mainly women's responsibility, amounting up to 8 hours of work in a day. Men engage very little in these tasks

Feminisation of agriculture necessitates sharing domestic work

- Women's engagement in reproductive work hinders their involvement in productive activities. This will only



Feminisation of agriculture

The increase in women's participation in agricultural production, compared with men's participation. This arises for a number of reasons, including an increased demand for labour and men's involvement in off-farm labour. Feminisation of agriculture also necessitates refocusing agricultural extension.

BGP findings

Women are increasingly hired as labour for field crops as male labour move towards the non-farming sectors, and fish and poultry enterprises. In Khulna and Satkhira, women are hired for almost all farm operations. In Patuakhali women are mainly hired for non-rice crops, often providing all labour for these crops.

Source: BGP 2019 outcomes survey report



Domestic work in BGP gender sessions

BGP developed gender flipcharts to visualise a broad range of gender topics. An illustration depicting all family members, including the husband and the son, engaged in domestic work became highly popular among women participants. They mentioned that this was their dream scenario.

change with a reduction in domestic work. Increasing women's workload can also adversely affect these women's health

- Domestic workloads also impose restrictions on other opportunities, including market engagement and community activities
- The large gap in total workload between men and women is unjust from a gender equality perspective

BGP's work in changing roles of women and increased workloads

The program had not foreseen issues relating to the changing roles and increased workloads for women when it commenced, but gradually, the need to address these became stronger. The program thus:

- targeted women better for extension services according to their needs. These services included orientation on market linkages in homestead Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and the inclusion of women in Community Agricultural Water Management (CAWM) FFS
- polder teams raised awareness on the recognition of women's domestic work, and the need to share it with other members of the family

Sheuli's story

40-year-old Sheuli Begum is a general member of the Chachuri Water Management Group (WMG) in polder 25, Khulna. She was married off at the

age of 15, while a student of Class 7. Her husband was a small farmer with 132 decimals of land. The family struggled financially, but Sheuli was determined to work for a better future.

She joined the Chachuri WMG in 2017 to pursue her dreams of a better life. As a member of the WMG, she participated in BGP's gender awareness-raising sessions, including the Gender and Leadership Development training.

Sheuli recognised the value of women's engagement in productive work, joint decision-making for the family, and the need to share domestic workloads. She shared this with her husband, and he supported her.

Sheuli decided to sell some of her jewellery to invest in a cow and some poultry. With her income, she and her husband were able to invest in an additional 100 decimals of land for fisheries.

Before joining BGP, Sheuli almost never engaged in productive work. She now works in her family's vegetable fields daily, feeds their fish, and is engaged in increased homestead production. Her husband and sons share in the domestic work to ensure her workload is manageable.

Increased incomes have meant that Sheuli and her family have been able to invest in a brick house. Sheuli is also finally able to pursue her dreams of attaining a Higher School Certification. She is currently preparing for her exams as a student of the Open University.

When BGP raised the concept of sharing domestic work by husband and wife, it was first met with general scepticism by both men and women. The belief that domestic tasks are a woman's responsibility was deeply ingrained in society.

Following further discussions, women recognised that it would be helpful to have their family's support in these tasks. Men were less keen to help, but gradually, they better recognised the extent of their wives' responsibilities. They also admitted that their wives would be able to engage in more income-generating activities if they had less to do at home. There is now some evidence of men engaging more in domestic work in BGP polders. They support in tasks such as collecting water, preparing vegetables for cooking, washing dishes, and cleaning.

