

# Blue Gold Program

## Women's empowerment in the Blue Gold Program

## Gender equality and women's empowerment



## Gender equality in the Blue Gold Program

Gender equality means that both women and men have equal opportunities and chances. Women's empowerment means that women gain more control over their own lives. There are three distinct dimensions to women's empowerment:

- Women have equal access to resources
- Women are able to participate in, and also influence decision-making
- As a consequence of the first two, women experience improvements in their well-being

### Importance of women's empowerment in the Blue Gold Program (BGP)

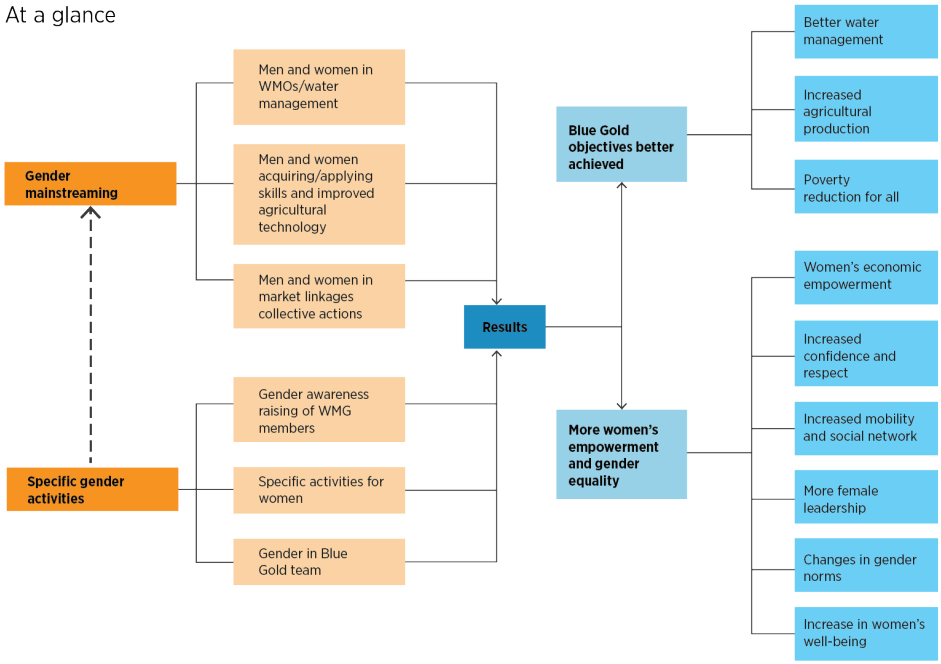
- To ensure that both men and women benefit from BGP. Gender equality and women's empowerment are not only human rights, but also a specific policy of the Government of Bangladesh
- To better ensure that the overall objectives of BGP are met

### Barriers to empowerment



- Women not recognised as farmers
- Women have less access to information, knowledge, and resources
- Market linkages, public speaking, decision-making on farms, and income management perceived as male domains
- Women's contributions considered less valuable, evidenced by lower wages for women compared to men
- Domestic work is neither recognised, nor shared by men. This, along with productive work, overloads women

**Gender in Blue Gold**
At a glance



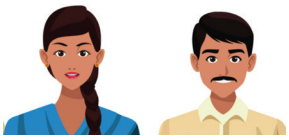


**"Women are committed to applying what they learnt from training, as they feel more empowered. They feel that trainers recognise them as equals to men."**

**Gender mainstreaming is central to BGP interventions.** Gender issues were thus taken into account in core BGP activities, targeting both men and women whenever relevant. Specific gender activities complemented and enhanced the success of gender mainstreaming.

## BGP INTERVENTIONS TO EMPOWER WOMEN

### Gender mainstreaming activities



#### Involvement of both men and women in Water Management Organisations (WMOs)

- **Women's membership in Water Management Groups (WMGs):** BGP wanted 40% of all WMG membership to be women. This target was exceeded, with women comprising 43% of all WMG membership (in 2018). This was due, in part, to motivation from field staff
- **Women as Executive Committee members of WMGs and Water Management Associations (WMAs):** the government quota of 30% women's membership in Executive Committees was fulfilled from the beginning of BGP interventions. However, active participation of women was initially lacking. More vocal and capable women joined these positions in later years
- **Greater say:** the proportion of women in important positions (with presidents, secretaries, and treasurers) increased over time. Women's leadership and decision-making capacities improved



#### Ensuring men and women both acquire and apply skills, knowledge and improved technology

Women were trained in different production techniques through Farmer Field Schools (FFS).

- 49,500 women participated in FFS (63% of all FFS participants)
- Women were primarily involved in homestead FFS, but engaged in other types of FFS as well
- Gender messages became a part of every FFS



#### Men and women develop market linkages and are involved in Collective Actions (CA)

Targeting women with market information met a previously unrecognised need of women farmers:

Women trained in market linkages by Blue Gold: 14,950

- Through special market linkages and women's empowerment training: 200
- Through market oriented FFS: 1,750
- Through recent FFS with market information: 13,000

33,650 women members of WMGs became involved in collective actions such as jointly buying inputs and/or jointly selling produce

### Examples of gender specific activities

#### Gender Courtyard Sessions and Gender and Leadership Development training

**Gender Courtyard Sessions (CYS)** raised awareness among men and women about gender equality, and clarified that WMG memberships are open to both men and women.

**Gender and Leadership Development (GLD)** training encouraged equal participation in work, decision-making and leadership.



**"Amra meye manush nah, amra manush."**

*("We are not just females, we are human beings.")*

## Results of gender mainstreaming and gender specific activities

### Participatory Water Management (PWM) benefit from the involvement of both men and women

Women are now valued as leaders of WMOs, and engage in decision-making for the benefit of the entire community.

### Women contribute to increased agricultural production

- 146,230 women adopted improved agricultural technologies
- 33,650 women increased their incomes through Collective Actions for economic activities

Notable increase in homestead and fish production. Some examples from FFS cycle 11:

- Average egg production increased from 32 to 71 eggs per month (98% female FFS participants)
- Average production of chicken or ducks increased from 1.5 to 4.5 per month (98% female FFS participants)
- Average number of different vegetables increased from 3.4 to 6.3 (100% FFS female participants)
- Average fish production increased from 49 to 123 kg/ season (78% female FFS participants)

### Women contribute to poverty reduction and improved livelihoods

- Households with access to land enjoy higher production levels, as women now engage substantially more in field work than before. They also apply improved technologies
- In households with homesteads, women are key to increased homestead production
- In poor households, women contribute to increased income by engaging more in wage labour work, for which there is now an increased demand because of BGP interventions

### Increased economic empowerment of women

Women acquired increased access to economic resources and opportunities. Women now generate more income and have more decision-making power on spending areas. There are more women entrepreneurs now as well.

### Social empowerment

Women are now more proud and confident in their capabilities and have more respect from their families and communities. They enjoy improved mobility and have wider social networks. They engage in leadership roles more.

### Gradual changes in gender norms

- Labour division less reliant on rigid gender norms
- Men more accepting women leaders
- Husbands taking their wives opinions into greater consideration

## Challenges

- Feminisation of agriculture requires refocusing of extension and women friendly technologies
- Women's workload increased due to increased productive work, along with domestic work
- Women's wages remained structurally lower than men's
- Women's participation is still relatively low in higher level organizations, such as WMAs

## Lessons learnt

- Gender mainstreaming and quota can work to achieve greater gender equality and women's empowerment, especially if accompanied by gender specific activities
- Women can be motivated to engage in water management and agricultural production. This ensures better achievement of a project's overall objectives