



Blue Gold Program success story

Women's empowerment and gender equality contributing to overall well-being

Context and rationale for intervention

Before the Blue Gold Program (BGP)'s intervention in the program polders:



Men worked in agriculture and women worked in domestic roles



Homestead production, such as rearing poultry, growing vegetables, and post-harvest work were viewed as domestic tasks, not productive work



Women had little to no income



Women were reserved and absent from public spheres



Men dominated at home and in public

Challenges and opportunities

These traditional norms hindered active participation of women in BGP interventions. Quotas to enable and encourage the active participation of women in BGP were crucial to the success of the initiative:

- BGP aimed to have 40% of all Water Management Groups (WMGs) composed of female general members

- The government requires 30% of Executive Boards of WMGs to be composed of women

Both targets were met, enhancing opportunities for women.

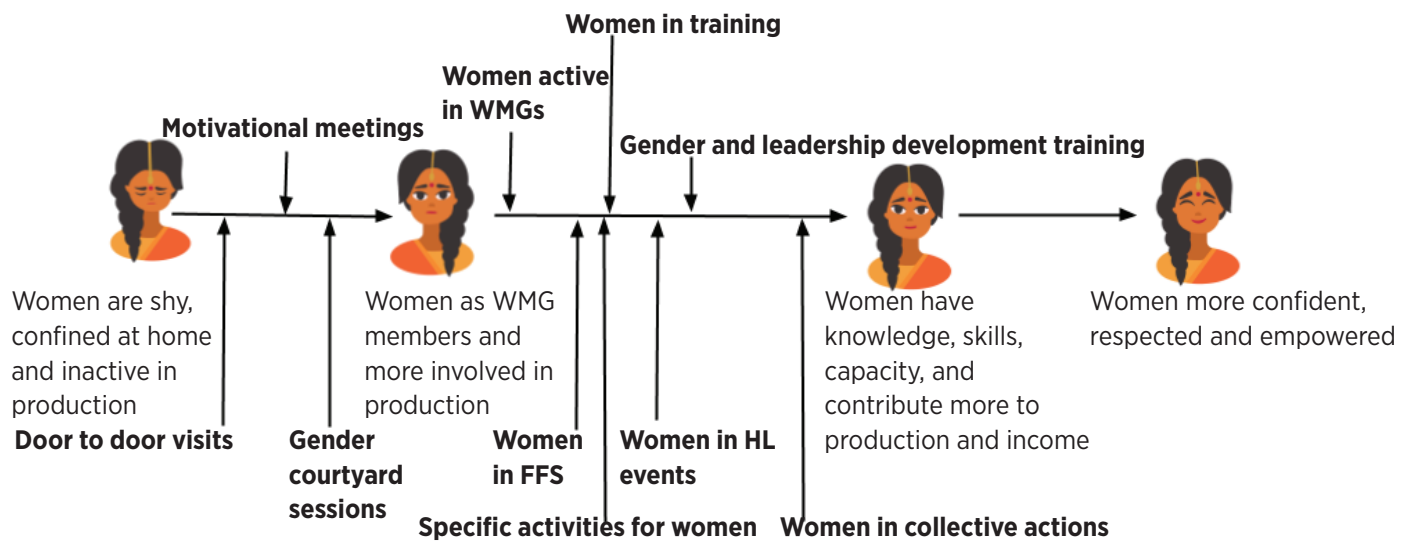
Gender mainstreaming and gender activities in BGP

- Women encouraged to actively participate in WMGs, including in important positions as chairperson, secretary and cashier (9% in 2018/ 2019)
- Women and men as participants in Farmer Field Schools (FFS) (63.8% women)
- Integration of gender issues in FFS sessions
- Women encouraged to participate in all BGP training (36.7% women)
- Women and men as participants in horizontal learning (56.8% women)
- Women and men in Collective Actions (CA) for economic activities (36.5% women)
- Gender and Leadership Development training for men (945) and women (3,750)
- Specific activities for women, such as training on development of market linkages and women's empowerment

Women now have the knowledge, skills and capacity to contribute more to production and household income. This contributed to overall BGP goals.

BGP interventions to enhance membership of women in WMGs

- **Emphasis on both men and women becoming members through BGP information, motivational meetings, and door-to-door visits**
- **Special gender courtyard sessions to motivate women's membership. These included awareness-raising topics on women's participation in productive/ income-generating activities, and playing vocal roles in decision-making processes**



Effects on women's empowerment

- Increased self-confidence
- Increased respect of husband, family and the community
- Expanded social networks, more mobility (including virtual mobility using phones)
- Increased access to inputs and markets
- Increased joint decision-making, especially with husband, about production and income expenditure
- Women now have more money to spend of their own
- Increased leadership of women and improved acceptance of women in leadership roles
- Improved well-being of women
- Reduction in domestic violence

Success factors to contribute to women's empowerment

- The 40% quota required BGP staff to mobilise women. Quotas alone, however, are not enough
- Motivation of men and women on equality issues, including the importance of women in income-generating activities
- Successful women serve as role models for other women
- Emphasis on women's empowerment benefitting everyone
- Increased awareness for men on breaking outdated gender norms
- BGP's efforts to include men and women in all training and FFS
- Commitment of BGP team and management

- Availability of gender expertise in BGP, and gender training of staff



Beauty Begum: Kolapara, Patuakhali

Beauty Begum is the Vice President (VP) of the Poshim Modukhali sluice WMG and an executive member of the WMA of polder 47/3.

Beauty's husband fell seriously ill three years back, leaving the family in dire straits. BGP encouraged Beauty to attend a courtyard session then, which made her consider previously unexplored options.

She then decided to invest in goats, and since then, poultry as well. She now earns enough from this to sustain her family.

As VP of the WMG executive committee, Beauty realised the need for a box culvert in her neighbourhood. With the support of her Union Parishad and eight other women, she both organised and joined a construction force to build one. This work was an additional source of income for these women.

Beauty takes great pride in her leadership roles and serves as a model for other women in the community.

Women's involvement in productive activities has now increased because of BGP. This is true for homestead and field crop production, and for wage labourers as well. However, since women do almost all domestic work, this led to an increase in their total workload, and also adversely affected their health. Yet, the women take pride in contributing to increased production.

With BGP's awareness-raising activities, men are gradually becoming aware of the enormous workload on their partners. There is now some attempt on their part to share this workload.

