



Blue Gold Program success story

Women in Collective Action and Market Linkages: increasing benefits and empowerment

Context

Visit any rural market in Bangladesh, and you will observe that almost all of the visitors are men. Maintaining contact with traders is seen as a male affair. When women engage in productive activities, such as poultry rearing, or growing rabi crops like watermelon, their husbands usually buy the inputs and sell the produce. Even if women sell any surplus such as eggs to their neighbours, they do not always keep the money. Rather, they may give it to their husband. And if women sell produce, they tend to accept the prices offered by the trader, rather than negotiating for better rates.

Turning point

With improved water management in the polders, the options for growing rabi crops such as (highly profitable) watermelon increased. Almost all of this cultivation was carried out by the women. But after they harvested the watermelons, it was the men who sold them to the traders and pocketed the money. Some women then asked: “is this fair?”

After becoming aware of this and other issues for women in relation to market access, BGP made more effort to also target women with market information, and to promote women’s involvement in collective actions.

Blue Gold interventions

- Training on market linkages and women’s empowerment to 172 women and 33 men
- Market-orientated Farmer Field Schools (FFS) with 1,750 women participants
- Market linkages integrated as a subject in all homestead FFS from Cycle 10 onwards, reaching nearly 13,000 women
- Promoting collective actions for economic activities, directly involving 25,250 women
- Training for agricultural input suppliers, also including several women

NB: Men and women participated in all above-mentioned interventions

Results of training on market linkages

- Enthusiastic women farmers: getting insight into marketing is an eye-opener for many of them
- Sharing information about market linkages with their family earned them increased respect
- Use of market knowledge: (i) using a phone to contact traders and collect price information, and (ii) better negotiation when selling
- Motivated to participate in—or even initiate—collective actions
- More income for (women) farmers, more confidence and empowerment, and more joint decision-making with husbands. Example of Lipika: Earlier she sold eggs at BDT 8. Now, she collects her and other people’s eggs to sell at BDT 10



Collective Action in the marketing context:

Jointly buying inputs, jointly selling produce and/or jointly acquiring market information. Water Management Groups (WMGs) and/or Resource Farmers (RFs) often play a key role in organising collective actions. Benefits are achieved through group bargaining power, reduction of costs and/or increase in revenues.

Market linkages:

Market linkages refer to both the purchase of inputs and the selling of outputs.



Layli's story: More self-confidence led to more income

Layli and her husband are based in polder 43/1A. Her husband has a physical impairment, so she does most of the work on their land, sometimes for as long as 7 hours a day. She had some involvement in marketing, but her husband made all of the decisions. Layli participated in the market linkages and women's empowerment training at end-2017. Owing to her newly acquired knowledge, she is now more confident, and taking on more responsibilities. In 2017, she cultivated watermelon on 160 decimals of land, 80 decimals of which were leased. In 2018, she felt she could manage more, and cultivated watermelon on 240 decimals while leasing 160 decimals.

Before the training, she would sell the watermelons to a trader and accept the first offered price, but now, she bargains after checking the watermelon prices beforehand in Khulna, Jessore and Dhaka through her phone. The result is her wholesaler offers her a higher price than before. Her net profit in 2018 was nearly BDT 500,000 ("BDT 5 lakh"). This meant a higher income for her and her family. She has inspired her women neighbours, who now seek out her advice.

Shebika Biswas's story: a trustworthy input supplier

Shebika is a general member of the Mirjapur WMG in polder 27/1. She used to generate a meagre income by selling surplus homestead vegetables. After learning about

Integrated Pest Management as a FFS participant, she participated in training for agricultural input suppliers. Using a loan, she established an input shop, for which she received a licence. Due to the good advice she provides to farmers, her business started to expand. Now, she sells inputs for BDT 1 lakh per month in the agricultural season, corresponding with a monthly profit of BDT 15,000. She has a good reputation, and is recognised as a successful and trustworthy woman entrepreneur.

Binita Roy's story: organizing collective actions

In 2014, Binita Roy, a member of the Kanchan Nagar WMG in polder 29, participated in a FFS, and was selected to become a Resource Farmer (RF). She became proficient at organising collective actions for both the WMG and the community, starting with the collective purchase of sesame for 140 farmers, and rice seeds for 55 farmers. She organised a group of 35 women for moringa leaf collections, to be collectively sold at Sonadanga and Dumuria markets, fetching BDT 12 - 14 per kg. Many WMG members now grow vegetables, and due to Binita's initiative, the purchase of inputs and sales of produce also became collective. Her leadership and her commitment to the WMG and her community was recognised in 2018 when she was elected WMG president. Binita's motivation is to improve the socio-economic situation of her community, with a special focus on the women.



"I feel more empowered now, as more men in the community acknowledge and respect women as farmers after BGP started. That provides me the space to be more outspoken and more aware about my rights as a farmer."

- Layli

"Women can do everything like men, if they get the opportunity."

- Shebika

