



Sabina Fights Back Against Poverty

When I arrived at Sabina's house early morning, she was cooking for the family and her husband was seated right beside and helping her to do the household chores and both of them were smiling. This was enough for me to understand how Sabina changed her life and improved her position in the family as this is not a generic scenario in the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh. Yes this is Sabina, a 36 year old female milk collector living happily in Kodomtoli village under Bogra district with her husband Vutto Miah (40) and her two daughters Manisha (6) and Maisha (12).

Sabina came from a family of very poor farmers, and it was hard for them to make ends meet and she could not continue her studies after class 7. To add to her misery, she was a victim of child marriage at the age of 14 to a boy of 18. Instead of spending care free days playing with toys she was burdened with yet another poverty stricken family.

The situation remained unchanged for several years onwards as her husband is a day laborer who can barely maintain his family of four members. It was extremely tough for him to properly feed and clothe the family with such a low income. When the family was in this vulnerable situation, Sabina stepped forward to support the family. As she describes, *"It was difficult for my husband to cover the family expenditures alone. Sometimes we starved during the day and only had the chance to have our meal at night. This situation also hampered our children's education, clothing and the basic needs of the family. Then I decided to fight back the misery and desperately started seeking a job. Luckily CARE was working in our community with dairy producers. I joined the milk producers group and soon with the help of CARE I managed to find a job of a milk collector in our community. Thus my life started to change"*

In 2012 CARE Bangladesh initiated the Strengthening The Dairy Value Chain (SDVC II) project in this community and formed 5 milk producers groups (about 150 dairy farmers) to link them with the Digital Fat Testing (DFT) system. As the closest DFT milk collection point was far away from the community, it was tough for the producers to sell their milk and get a fair price. The problem was chronic and producers were losing money every day as there was no way left other than selling the milk to local milk man at a very low price. In a regular group meeting, this issue was discussed and Sabina raised her hand to become involved. Considering the group acceptance and educational background of Sabina, CARE selected her as a milk collector for the community. At the same time, the SDVC project helped her to get a loan of Taka 5000 to start her business.

This was the turnaround point of Sabina's life. At first she started to collect about 10-15 liters of milk per day but soon it increased and now she collects and sells 45-50 liters of milk per day. Everyday 30 milk producers gather at her collection center and sensing the business opportunity she contacts with local cattle feed suppliers and starts to store and sell cattle feed in her collection center to earn some extra income.



Thus besides being a house wife, Sabina now collects milk and sells cattle feed in her community. Every morning and evening she collects 45-50 liters of milk from the community milk producers and sells the same to the market level DFT milk collection point. There she keeps samples of individuals' milk so that she can pay the actual price to individual farmers based on the fat content. Sabina's husband helps her maintain the collection center and other household chores.

Additionally she sells 10-12 Kilograms of cattle feed per day. Through her milk collection and cattle feed business, she earns about BDT 2000-2500 (USD 25 to 30) every month, which helps her to back up her husband's income. As her husband says, *"It was difficult for me to cover the family expenses alone. Her income is helping the family to pay the educational cost of our children, utility bills and other daily household expenses. On the other hand, her business is helping the community people in a big way. They can now sell their milk close proximity to their doorsteps and can have good prices for the milk. Her support for the community lifts her position in the society and to me as well"*

She can now afford three square meals for her family and invest in her children's education. Previously vulnerable and helpless Sabina is now an empowered and financially independent woman in her community and has successfully made herself an example for others to follow. People around her village are also very happy with what she does. As one of the dairy farmers Rubi says, *"She saved us from the cheating ways of local milk collectors. We used to sell our milk at a very low price and with her help; we are now getting better prices of our milk. This has made us more interested in milk production and the required dairy input to keep our cows healthy. We will always remain indebted to her"*



With the little helping hand of CARE Bangladesh, Sabina has conquered all obstacles and regained her confidence. Like Sabina, there are countless of women who have great potential to overcome their distress, and CARE Bangladesh lends its hand to help them achieve their dreams and live a more dignified life.