

Dedication That's All it Takes



“If you have the right aspiration and devotion towards what you want to achieve in life, I guarantee that you will reach it at some point in time!!” these are the words that Selina Akhter, a twenty year old girl, from the village of Soratoli in Bogra was saying to other village girls her age. In just six months she was able to change her life like no one else in her village. She is an example of how one’s own dedication and sincerity can fulfill goals in life, despite many obstacles.

Selina is the third daughter of four children of a poor family from village of Buruj, in the Bogra district of Northern Bangladesh. Her father, a day laborer, is

52 year old Sahidul Islam. Sahidul Islam struggled to provide three square meals a day for the family of six and to cover educational expenses for his children. His wife, Gini Begum (40), also helped him maintain the family by working as a milk collector for the Buruj Collection Point. Among the children, Selina was a very bright student, but with such economic conditions it was very difficult for her father to allow her to continue her studies. After trying everything they could to keep Selina in school, her parents decided to discontinue her education to cover all of the other household expenses. But Selina was desperate for more education and cried to her parents to allow her to study at least up to high school (Grade 10). Sensing her desire for higher education, her parents granted her request despite all of the economic challenges they faced. Selina was not sitting back, she started to work as a private tutor to earn money to buy books and pens for herself; meanwhile, she took part in the SSC examination in 2013 and passed with distinction (GPA 4.39 in all subjects). But in spite of this success she was deeply dismayed because her parents could not continue to cover her educational expenses anymore and it was not possible for Selina to cover her educational expenses only with the money she earn through private tuition which was as low as BDT 300 (US\$ 4) per month. As such, she was desperate to find a source of income so that she could continue her studies and help support her family.

While searching for a part time job, she heard about a vacancy for an assistant at the Buruj Digital Fat Testing (DFT) milk collection point which is jointly operated by CARE and BRAC Dairy. She contacted the CARE SDVC II project official and informed him that she desperately wanted the job. After listening to her distressing but courageous story, CARE discussed the proposition with the collection point manager and with Selina’s parents. All parties were able to come to an agreement. Shortly thereafter, Selina’s new life



began. She started to work as a DFT assistant in of March 2013. It was very difficult to cope with the new job and technology associated with the DFT system but with the help of CARE coupled with her will power and drive to succeed, she soon mastered everything required for the position.

Social barriers were one of her greatest obstacles, as it was unusual for a woman to be in such a profession. However, with her determination to move forward, and with the help of CARE, she overcame all the obstacles and overcame these social barriers. After joining

the milk collection centre she started to attend the CARE producer group meetings and talked with the group members about the benefits of selling their milk to the DFT milk collection point. Soon after, the

participation of woman in the collection point increased and the collection point manager decided to increase her wage to BDT 2000 (US\$25) month, compensating her for going above the call of duty.

Her parents are happy that their daughter is able to earn money, as it is supporting not only her education but helping with other household expenses as well. As her mother says, "I am very happy because my beloved daughter is not only covering her educational expenses but also contributing to family expenses. I feel proud when other girls in the village come and ask for a job like the one Selina is doing." Her father no longer asks to discontinue her studies and has decided to allow Selina to enroll in the higher secondary school certificate exam. The proud father beams, "there is nothing more pleasant for a father than when his daughter earns money for the family. She is not only covering her educational expenses but also paying for some educational expenses for my other two children and I think this is remarkable. Now the village people speak to me with honor. Neither me nor my daughter are merely another face in the crowd, it's clear that we have done something different"

Every day she works at the collection point from 6:00 am to 8:30 am. After that she attends college and then goes home to do her daily chores. She then returns to the collection point to work from 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Although very busy, Selina is now leading a better life and has the ability to fulfill her dreams. She aims to finish her studies and to be increasingly self-reliant. She has become a shining example of success in her community. As she says, "I have a bigger vision for my life and this has helped me a lot to reach this stage. I want to use my strong willpower to achieve the ultimate success of my life. I am very grateful to the CARE SDVC project for showing me the right path which helped me to become what I am and what I want to be in the future"



Selina has become a symbol of hope for her entire family. Other parents in her village all want a daughter like Selina. She has broken social barriers and is now free from ridicule to work in a male-dominated profession. CARE has facilitated her relationship with BRAC, trained her to operate the Digital Fat Testing machine and linked her with the project impact group. She is now well known to all the milk producers who sell their milk to DFT milk collection point. Rehana Begum (40), one of the farmer leaders of a milk producing cooperative group, says that "we feel very comfortable to sell our milk to a girl who is from our village. We can now discuss any problems

with her. She teaches us how the milk fat is measured and how we can increase our milk quantity and fat percentage. We are lucky to have her at the collection point. The other women farmers are now more willing to sell their milk to the collection point and as a result the total milk collected has increased."

Selina is seen as a role model in her community. After undergoing a life of distress and poverty, she was able to return herself to a dignified life through the help of CARE SDVC. She looks to build off her success and wants to accomplish even bigger vision in the future

The Voyage

It is said that, women are hidden hand in agricultural sector and contribute in every step of cultivation equality even more in some cases but hardly recognized. They have access to resources but don't have control. Even they treated with little importance in most of the village household. Sahana Begum is a startling example in front of all those economically, culturally, physiologically and socially vulnerable female who are the victim of modern slavery by their own family.

Sahana Begum, 34 lives in Chaksa Mor Para village under Boro Pangash union working as a feed seller from nearly 2 years. She lives with her husband Mohammad Altaf Mia (42) in a extended family with 9 members excluding her two children. Her husband is a farmer and work on seasonal basis. Being the ender son of the family the total family depends on the earning of Sahana Begum's husband which make them struggled a lot to secure the three square meals per day. To accelerate the income both husband and wife decided to start a small business as feed seller. Sahana's husband spends most of the time in the field so Sahana became the major initiator of their small business with moral support of her family. Everything was planed but as time passes social, cultural barrier came in front of Sahana's propriety as always but she, with full motivational stand point stand still on her goal and aspiration to achievement. She sometimes became insipid and became frustrated but when she look at the face of her daughter she realize if she turn back her children will suffer the same inequality. Why a women will suffer in the moment of financial crisis by sitting at home when she can contribute in secure her household financial security? It is not a question raised by Sahana it is an inner voice of every single woman in the society fighting for her right, fighting for justice and equity. Most of the village people did not take it granted that a female is working as feed seller out of house. So it became hard to continue the business flawlessly. Instead of all barriers Sahana keep continued her business nearly 2 years with less benefit sometime losses before she came to know about Krishi Utsho (KU) a social venture of CARE Strengthening the Dairy Value Chain Project II for facilitating the access to inputs for the farmers.



When Sahana struggling to support his family she came to know about SDVC project and became a member of the project. From attending group session she came to learn about the input requirements of farmers and how SDVC is trying to mitigate this with their intervention regarding the access to inputs. She shares this with her husband and with regaining lots of hope they again start the business with the investment of 50 thousand taka. At the beginning they start selling the feed among the group members. And as time passes her business starts to extend from group members to other farmers in the society. Group members are satisfied with the performance of Sahana so they refer others to buy feed from her. Her business began to grow.

Shahana is now earning nearly 30 thousand taka per month. Before introducing with KU her family earning was 10-12 thousand taka per now she earn double of her previous income. It does not only give her a financial security but most importantly respect in her family and society. Within 6 month she raised 2 room and now thinking to buy cow. She is very pleased for the support of Krishi Utsho. Now she is thinking to expand her business by taking a loan from suitable organization. She also expressed her wish to be a franchise of KU in near future and working hard to reach her goal.

Sahana Begum is a good example of women empowerment; she is one of the women from the rural village where still female has to take permission from the head of the family to go out of house. Sahana Begum studied till class 9 but from her patience and interest. Other women in this village now realize the importance of economically empowerment of women. Sahana said” I see how village people’s thinking on women empowerment change after SDVC project launch. The villager who ignores me once to buy feeds now became by permanent customer, even most of them come to my door to collect feed”.

Sahana not only create opportunity by her own but also place a example to the women of her village and create directly or indirectly involvement of women in economic process, as her most of the customer are female. One single step can lead ten to stand forward; ten will lead thousand towards change.

We are happy than ever before!



Boitabhanga union in Bogra district is relatively under developed and neglected union. The main occupation of the people is agriculture, livestock rearing and milk production. The people used to face lots of obstacles such as poor quality treatment facilities, feed and medicine. Moreover, the pricing and market management was not structured. Keeping these problems in consideration CARE Bangladesh's SDVC project started work at north-western nine districts of the country through to strengthen the dairy value chain and income

generation of the farmers. Gradually it started its work at Boitabhanga union by developing 10 farmer groups around the Boitabhanga community.

About 80% of the families in Baithavanga village produce milk and are linked to the milk selling business. It is a very remote village and transport communication is poor, getting a fair price for the milk they produce was a big challenge for the producers due to the poor infrastructure. Local collector used to buy milk at a very minimum price which was as low as BDT 28 on average. As a result, the milk producers were gradually losing their interest in cow rearing.

In the initial stage SDVC worked to increase farmers' capacities, provided assistance to get different services and made strong linkages between different private sectors so that they could get different facilities conveniently. As a result of these initiatives there was a visible change in milk production. But there was no reasonable market in that area. People used to sell milk at open markets and at a lower price. In this mechanism all producers were receiving similar prices irrespective of the quality of milk, and as a result the good farmers were discouraged to produce good quality milk.



As a result the good farmers were discouraged to produce good quality milk.



In this situation, the SDVC project established a DFT collection point at Baithavanga in coordination with BRAC to ensure the fat based price to the producers which will help to grow their interest in cow rearing. At that time, only 23 liters milk was being collected per day on average from the DFT collection point. Although the producers were supplying their milk at DFT collection point, they were not benefiting because milk fat percentages were low, averaging 3.4% per liter.

To solve the problem the project started to develop the technical capacity of the producers related to increasing milk fat and linked producers with high quality inputs through its input service network. With the assistance of project staff, the producers changed the cattle feed, milking process and other management practices. Now they are practicing proper animal husbandry management for their cows and as a result the fat percentage in their milk is increasing day by day. Presently the average fat percentage is 4.3% and 300 liters of milk is being collecting from this DFT collection point daily.

As a result the other farmers were able to sell milk through DFT profitably. Now farmers' income has increased and there is a good response regarding DFT, farmers are being motivated to dairy farming and exchanging knowledge among themselves. After establishing the DFT machine some changes in the community is very apparent such as increased interest on cow rearing, improved feeding practice and awareness regarding quality milk production. Currently, 47 farmers are selling about 315 liters of milk through the DFT point daily and everyday new farmers are joining the list. Increased participation of women is also visible in the points because of the convenient system structure of the collection point. The producers are now getting BDT 38 on average for per liter of milk which BDT 10 higher than previous.

Another big change is the access of women in marketing activities increased significantly. Now women are selling their milk in this collection point and getting the fair price of milk also receiving the payment from the collection point which will make them more confident in terms of economical, mobility and dealings with others.

The Baithavanga milk producing farmers were given a trustworthy shelter by DFT collection point for selling their milk. Now the producers are able to sell their milk at a reasonable price and in a convenient and steady point and they are committed to continue this DFT collection point by their own initiatives. As they says, "DFT is like a bless for us and we are very happy to have such facility in this poor community of ours."