

Stories of Resilience



Single mother and labor under cash-for-work program



Story and Photo: Evelin Jaita
Karmaker/CARE

Mariam Khatun (35) is a single mother with three young children in Camp 16, Potibunia. She lost her husband one and half years ago to cancer in Myanmar. Since then, life has been very difficult for her. As women were not allowed to work outside in Myanmar, supporting her family was very hard. She managed to find some work in local farms, owned by Muslim families, but she had to work very discreetly, so that no one would notice her.

After violence began in Myanmar, she left Myanmar with her children. It took them 10 days to reach here.

Although Mariam is content with the aid and services she needs, it is still difficult for her, **“I need to raise my children as a single parent and I need work.”**, she said. So when she came to know of an income opportunity, she immediately took it. She ignored any socio-cultural norms and started working as a labor under cash-for-work program for CARE.

Seeing how the women in Bangladesh are free to work outside and how it gives them financial freedom, Mairum said, **“all the women in the camp should not just sit at home, they should do small jobs like me and bring solvency in their families. Today, if my younger daughter gets any such opportunity I will gladly allow her to work as I know it’s safe and dignifying.”**

Shot but undefeated



Story and Photo: Evelin Jaita
Kamtekair/CARE

Khurshida Akter (32) came to Bangladesh with her parents and 7 other siblings around 11 months ago. They needed to walk for seven days to make it to Bangladesh. But on the way, a bullet brushed by her ankle, injuring Khurshida. Limping with agony, she managed to arrive at Myanmar border and only after crossing over to Bangladesh, she received medical attention at the border.

Khurshida used to hold a job as medical technician with a UN agency in Myanmar. She used to collect blood samples. Although the accident made her life difficult, Khurshida refused to be seen as weak and incapable.

“We are three sisters, two brothers with old parents. None of us are married, there is a lot of pressure. Since I have the ability and experience to work, I work to support my family’s basic extra needs”, she explained. She works as a WASH volunteer in Camp 16. She earns BDT 5,000 (around USD 58) per month. Her job is to visit households within the camp and raise awareness on maintaining hygiene and cleanliness; especially among pregnant women. She spends her salary for buying vegetables, meat, fish, spices and betel leaf for the family.

Overcoming domestic challenges



Story and Photo: Evelin Jaita
Korostoff/CARE

Rafika used to be a home-based dress maker in Myanmar. Women would bring clothes and she would make them to order. Her husband had timber related business. Along with two of her children, a step-child, they had a happy life. However, the situation changed drastically given the rise of in Myanmar. They had to flee Myanmar and Camp 16 has been their home for nearly a year now.

But her once happy family started falling apart months after arriving in Bangladesh. Her husband suddenly became violent and abusive, and she started seeing his ex-wife again. Rafika was being forced to share her rations and resources with the first wife.

This situation was devastating for her, as theirs was a love marriage. From some neighbors she heard about the Women Friendly Space that offers psychosocial counselling to women and girls. So she started visiting the WFS operated by CARE in Block A. She was able to share her worries and concerns and seek counselling from the experts.

Having received a lot of motivation and encouragement, Rafika is now focused on earning money through her tailoring skills. She believes if she starts earning again, she will have a voice to speak up against her husband. **“I am willing to work again”, she said, “If I had a sewing machine, I could earn and support my family”.**

Consultations from the WFS and Rafika’s determination has helped change her situation. She has found a way to deal with her husband’s aggressive behavior and plans to take some measures once she is more self-reliant.

Discovering financial freedom



Story: Nusrat Daud Pritha/CARE
Photo: Asafuzzaman Captain/CARE

Walking through the muddy narrow pathway, jumping puddles and steep sand bag stairs, Tosmin arrives at the school. Someone greets her and asks how she is. As she entered the make shift school in Camp 16, Block D, all the students greeted her and settled down. Tosmin is a teacher here for over five months now. Her teaching career dates back to Myanmar, but she only taught as a private tutor.

Tosmin's husband, who used to be an NGO worker, was abducted and killed in Myanmar. Perhaps she would have still stayed in Myanmar, but when news spread that children above 12 years were being abducted, she knew it was not safe for them to stay anymore. She has 5 children, oldest one being 15 year old. She came away in November last year.

Being a single mother with five children, Tosmin decided to start sewing with hand, so that little extra money could be earned to fulfill her children's needs. Three months after her arrival, she learned that an NGO was looking for teachers for in-camp schools. Tosmin took the exams and got the job.

Had her husband been alive, he may not have allowed her to work outside. And while his loss has been very difficult for her and the children, but she did not give up. Despite social stigmas, she took a job that allows her to focus on the present and cherish what she is able to do for herself and her children. **“Being a teacher is more prestigious than being a tailor or a tutor. Women should have opportunity to earn; it gives them financial freedom.”** she said.