



**‘VOICE OF THE WOMEN
VOICE OF THE EARTH’
SUCCESS STORY BOOK**

Economic Empowerment
of Rural Women (EERW) Programme
in Bangladesh



A woman wearing a blue and red floral sari is crouching in a field, harvesting eggplants. She is holding a blue basket filled with harvested eggplants. The background shows a lush green field with trees in the distance.

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Message

MAJOR GENERAL (RETD.) ATM ABDUL WAHAB
Chairman, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS)

It is my pleasure to share the Success Story Book “Voice of the Women, Voice of the Earth” under the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (EERW) Programme. The EERW programme has been implemented by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS).

The Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (EERW) Programme is the first-ever women focused Livelihoods and Protection related programme of BDRCS. The programme provided support to 841 underprivileged and marginalized women of Kachukata Union under Nilphamari Unit, with skill training and cash grants to uplift their livelihoods.

The programme participants used the grants and acquired knowledge in improving their livelihoods. Many of them enhanced their livelihoods status successfully which is really a very good achievement of the programme. The financial improvement of those women contributes to upgrade their position at the household and community levels. It is expected to reduce gender-based violence in the programme area by the process of empowerment.

I believe that the Success Story Book will be used as a learning tool by the reader at all levels. The document will educate people about the key approaches of women empowerment as well as key aspects of successful livelihoods options for women. The quotes made by the EERW Programme participants can be used as exemplary quotes to inspire other underprivileged women of other areas of Bangladesh. All the learnings of the documents can be scaled up in other programmes of BDRCS and other development organizations in reducing gender-based violence in Bangladesh.

I am hopeful that BDRCS will keep the continuation of implementing similar actions as well as programmes to contribute in empowering women all over the country.





MD. FERAZ SALAH UDDIN

Secretary General, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS)

Message

I am happy to announce that Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) is going to publish a Success Story Book “Voice of the Women, Voice of the Earth” of Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (EERW) Programme. BDRCS and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) have worked closely for implementing Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (EERW) Programme funded by Kuwait Red Crescent Society. The programme has been implemented at Kachukata Union under Sadar Upazila of Nilphamari district. The beneficiaries of the programme have been supported through training and cash grants to increase economic status of their household. It is assumed that the economic opportunity will enhance empowerment of underprivileged women, and subsequently reduce the gender-based violence in the programme area.

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society is addressing Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) issue as cross cutting issues in it's all programmes, but it is time to think more than that. There are two focus of the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (EERW) Programme are livelihoods and women empowerment. To achieve the objectives of the programme it has supported 841 vulnerable women with skills training and cash grants to continue their livelihoods. Besides, the programme assists to form 10 (Ten) Women Forum (9 at word level and 1 at Union level) those worked in establishing linkage with government and non-government service providers to make availability of services. By the effort of the programme many supported women have managed to change their livelihoods status significantly. The success story book is the presentation of some evidence of EERW Programme.

I think that the document will help to learn from EERW Programme participants through actions as well as quotes. To inspiring people the book can be used as learning tool. The lessons of the documents can also be used in designing and implementing any similar project/programmes of BDRCS and other development practitioners. I am confident that BDRCS will keep the continuation of implementing similar women focused programmes in coming days. I hope that IFRC and Kuwait Red Crescent Society will accompany BDRCS in such kind of interventions.

Message

SANJEEV KUMAR KAFLEY

Head of Delegation, IFRC Bangladesh

I am happy to know that the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) is going to publish a Success Story Book "Voice of the Women, Voice of the Earth" under the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (EERW) Programme in Bangladesh. I would like to congratulate BDRCS for successfully implementing the EERW Programme which was a multi-country level programme funded by Kuwait Red Crescent Society and technically supported and coordinated by IFRC Bangladesh Country Delegation. The programme targeted to build resilience and increase the livelihood options amongst marginalized and underprivileged women and to orient different stakeholders on prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). The EERW programme was a very timely and effective approach to support women empowerment by offering different types of livelihood options with a view to ensuring skill development and enhancing the incoming generating capacities of the targeted beneficiaries.

Though the empowerment of women and gender diversity is a focused component of different resilience programmes of BDRCS. But the EERW was the first Programme of BDRCS which was designed and implemented focusing on the economic empowerment of women. The Programme has contributed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

BDRCS should plan to scale up such types of Programmes and to encourage the replication of the programme approach in other long-term and recovery interventions in Bangladesh, which will complement in achieving the broader goal of the country's sustainable development. IFRC is committed to closely work with the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society.

I hope that the publication of the Success Story Book will be helpful for both BDRCS and IFRC to show the achievements of the programme among different stakeholders. The publication will remain as the example that BDRCS has proven experience in implementing livelihoods and women empowerment Programmes which will help BDRCS to design and implement future women economic empowerment programmes in Bangladesh.



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Acknowledgments

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) would like to acknowledge the community people of the Kachukata Union of Nilphamari for providing cooperation to implement the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (EERW) Programme in Bangladesh. And now, BDRCS is preparing a Success Story Book "Voice of the Women, Voice of the Earth" to demonstrate the results and success of the programme. In this regard, BDRCS is recognizing the contribution of the women beneficiaries for providing information to prepare the document. The department of government service providers (Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, Women Affairs, Technical Training College and other govt. and non-govt. organizations) and Kachukata Union Parishad of Nilphamri district, those provided training and guidance to the beneficiaries are worthy to get thanks for their contribution. Credit also goes to the three Ward Facilitators and Livelihoods Officer of EERW Programme and, Unit Level Officer and Hon'ble Chairman and Unit Secretary of Nilphamari Red Crescent Unit for providing all types of necessary support and cooperation to complete the fieldwork. BDRCS is giving thanks to IFRC Bangladesh to support and coordinate the programme. Finally, BDRCS is grateful to Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) for giving the fund to implement the programme for the economically vulnerable and marginalized women for economic empowerment.

Declaration

The Success Story Book “Voice of the Women, Voice of the Earth” has been published based on the achievements that were accumulated through the implementation of the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (EERW) Programme in Bangladesh. Documenting and using success stories is the major work for preparing the document and demonstrating the outcomes of the programme. In this regard, ethical standards were maintained while doing the fieldwork for accumulating the success stories from the direct women beneficiaries who got different livelihoods support under the programme. The community people and women beneficiaries were informed about the objectives for collecting the success stories. Written permission was taken from the beneficiaries by proper format of BDRCS; whose opinions and photos have been used in the report. The Department of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRM), BDRCS will preserve the ownership of the publication.

Programme B R I E F

Name of the Programme : Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (EERW) Programme in Bangladesh

Programme Area : Kachukata Union of Sadar Upazila of Nilphamari.

Implemented by : Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).

Technically Supported by : International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

Funded by : Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS).

Programme Duration : October 2019 to December 2021.

Goal of the Programme : To build resilience and increase the livelihood options amongst marginalized and underprivileged women to become economically productive and empowered through established livelihoods and prevention on SGBV.

Objectives of the Programme :

- Underprivileged women equipped with skills, strengthened their livelihoods income have access to basic needs-help improved household resilience.
- Strengthened women's empowerment and protection through Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) prevention activities.

Context of the Programme Area : The Programme was implemented at an area which is a rural side of northern Bangladesh. And the education rate is very low in the area. The community people used to depend on agriculture for their livelihood purposes. The women had very less opportunities for income generating activities. Though some of the portions of women work, these works were based on home services, and they had very less mobility to the other areas. And they could save a very little money from their earnings compared to the current market values. The women had different social constraints and household restrictions and lack of social networking and limited access to the labour market. The rate of dowry culture and child marriage was very high in the area.



Targeted Beneficiaries :

- 1,121 direct beneficiaries (841 women for livelihoods+280 local community leaders)
- 14,205 indirect individuals.

Major activities under the Programme :

- A total 841 beneficiaries received relevant livelihood training and cash grant supports
- A total of 101 women beneficiaries were linked to the local market
- A total 283 stakeholders were oriented on SGVB
- 5 female RCYs got technical trainings
- Regular awareness raising sessions on SGVB, child protection orientation
- 09 Women Forum Forums
- Revolving Fund for Women
- Complaints Response Mechanism (CRM) to ensure community engagement and accountability to the beneficiaries and community people
- Exchange Visit to share the leaning of Programme
- IEC material including leaflet, poster, billboard, Ludu
- Coordination Meeting at Unit and Central level
- Sensitization activities on COVID-19
- Baseline Survey and Final Evaluation
- Lessons Learned Workshop at Unit and Central level.



Livelihoods supports to the Women Beneficiaries



Sl. no.	Items	Cash grant per beneficiary (BDT)	Number of beneficiaries
01.	Livestock-Cow	17,000	87
02.	Livestock-Goat	10,000	27
03.	Handicrafts (material & capital)	10,000	15
04.	Tailoring (machine & capital)	10,000	26
05.	Vegetable Gardening	8,000	239
06.	Poultry Rearing	8,000	397
07.	Small Business	10,000	38
08.	Plant Nursery	12,000	2
09.	Seeds Bank	10,000	3
10.	Fish Cultivation	8,000	7
Total			841

Innovation of the Programme :

- Revolving Fund
- Women Forums.

Success OF THE PROGRAMME

Impacts/Results of the Programme :

- About 86% of the direct women beneficiaries have got income opportunities and they actively earned utilizing their supports.
- About 41% of the direct women beneficiaries have increased income by 10%.
- More than 80% of SGBV related services and information were available at the local Government level.
- About 70% of the women have access to services and information that are available at the Local Government level.
- Women's participation in economic decision making has effectively improved about 35% of the direct beneficiaries which was about 22% in baseline survey.
- Market linkage to women have motivated women to take initiatives as entrepreneurs and make them engaged in income generating economic activities.
- Advocacy meeting and related Day observation have increased the awareness of women on their proper rights and way of involving in economic activities.
- The Programme has helped to reduce the child marriage and dowry at the community.
- The Programme has helped in institutionalizing women empowerment in other programmes of the RCRC movement in Bangladesh.

Replication in Bangladesh : Coastal DRR programme of BDRCS, has replicated the EERW modality in Cash Based Intervention (CBI) following the success of EERW Programme.

SUCCESS STORIES



VEGETABLE GARDENING



“Vegetable Cultivation Changed my Life”

Sree Trishna Ray (33) has been cultivating different types of vegetables in her homestead garden since last eight months after receiving the support of BDRCS. She has already earned BDT 7,000 by selling the vegetables in the local markets. She said, **“I need not buy any vegetables as my household member’s needs of vegetables are fulfilled from my homestead gardening. Vegetable gardening and cultivation is now profitable for me. Now, I can provide money to my children for educational purposes. I have considerable roles in household matters and decision-making processes”**.





VEGETABLE GARDENING

“Income from Vegetable Garden Empowering My Life”

Shuda Rani Roy (33) got orientation and financial support for vegetables gardening under EERW Programme of BDRCS. She said, “in this Rabi season, I have already earned BDT 6,000 by selling different vegetables like brinjal, papaya, gourd, spinach and species ginger, yellow spice. I hope to earn more in the rest of this winter as there is huge demand and higher price of vegetables and spices in this area”.





VEGETABLE GARDENING

“BDRCS Supports Helped Me to be an Agricultural Entrepreneur”

Rahima Begum (38) is now an agricultural entrepreneur who has initiated different types of agricultural production by utilizing the financial support and training from EERW Programme. She is a widow whose husband died 09 years ago suffering from disease. She said, **“I had a hard time leading the household as well as running my household. My husband left some lands where I used to cultivate paddy and some other vegetables but that was not enough for her as it was profitable to fulfil the necessities and other essential costs of the household. When I got support from BDRCS then I have been cultivating different types of vegetables, banana, spinach, guava, lemon, cucurbit, string bean, gourd which became very profitable for me. I will have more earnings in the coming days as she will sell these products to the businessmen of the local markets. In the community, the people refer me as an agricultural entrepreneur”**.





TAILORING

“My Disappointed Life Turned into a Self-dependent”

Most. Nurbanu (34) has come out from a previous despondent situation as she started earning by tailoring support by BDRCS. Now she can prepare and repair clothes for both men and women and she has been earning BDT 5,500 to 6,000 per month. She mentioned, “by utilizing the earnings, I have brought a goat and taken a mortgage of 08 decimal lands. My life has changed in the last one year and now I have almost equal earnings like my husband, and I am saving money in the account of a local NGO which made me economically empowered”.





TAILORING



“Proper Training Helped me to Get Success in Tailoring”

Morjina Begum (37) has been earning monthly BDT 2,500 to 3,000 from tailoring since last one year. Her husband is a rickshaw puller who has a limited income that was not enough for them to bear the household cost smoothly. She said, **“I used to seek alternative working options which would help to contribute to the expenditure for household purpose. When EERW Programme began in Kachukata Union then I was selected as one of the beneficiaries and I received two months practical training, sewing machine and financial assistance to carry on her tailoring works. Now I have good income which I am utilizing for the household expenditure purposes. I got commercial success and I am getting more customers. This has been possible as she got proper training and approach of market linkage”**.





POULTRY



“I am Utilizing my Profit for Daughter’s Education”

Mirani Banu (45) has got profit by rearing hens in her household by the financial support of EERW Programme. In earlier times, Mirani used to assist her husband in agricultural works but that was not enough for her to earn and save some money for herself which she can give to her children for educational purposes. She said, **“the scenario had changed when I got financial support from BDRCS to rear hens in my household. I have got a significant profit from the hen rearing. Now I am spending the earnings for my girl’s education purpose”**.





PLANT NURSERY

“My Knowledge, Skills and Income are My Strength”

Rashida Begum (60) got practical training and financial support from BDRCS then she started doing saplings production in greater style. She mentioned, **“I have produced different saplings like olives, mahogany, gamma tree, mango, jackfruit which have great market demand. Now I have almost BDT 70,000 valued samplings in my nursery which is a great asset for me. I know better techniques to preserve to use the seeds and grow saplings from the seeds. The practical training provided by BDRCS gave me a chance to hold the nursery which is a big source of income for my household”**.





PLANT NURSERY

“Now I have commercial Connection for Nursery Business”

Sreemoti Gita Rani (55) had a nursery where she and her husband jointly used to cultivate saplings of different trees. But they did not have sufficient market linkage so that they would have earned more. When Gita Rani got the support under ERRW Programme then she got orientation on proper market linkage. She said, **“after that period, my husband and I expanded the market of selling of the saplings in different areas of Nilphamari district. Now my household has an enhanced income than the previous times as the commercial connection with the businessmen. We sell the saplings to different businessmen in their home as well as in markets”**.



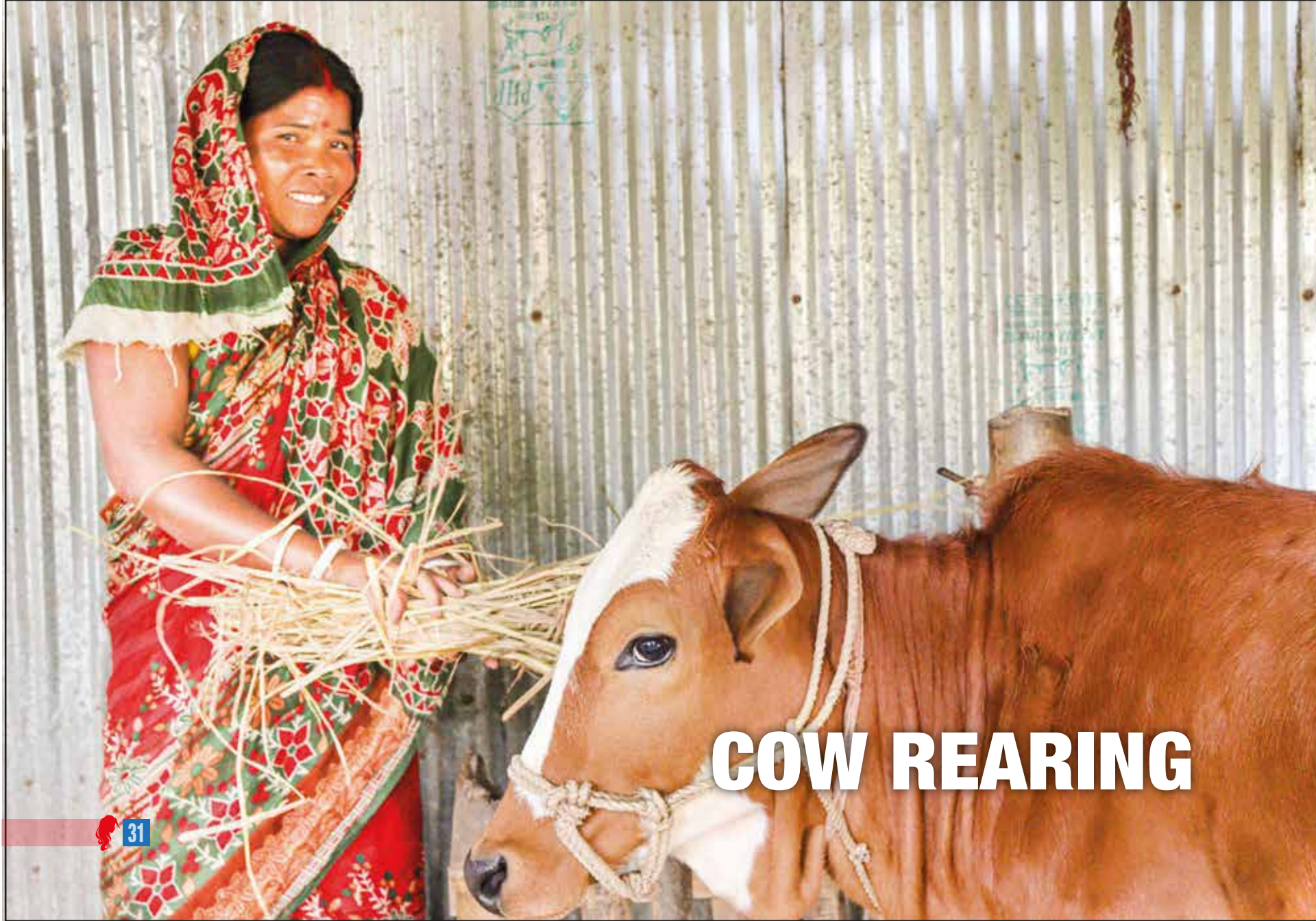


COW REARING

“Earned Money, Saved Money, and Built My Fate”

Parmina Begum (45) has now a calf of the cow that she brought by the financial support provided by BDRCS. Her household is dependent on agricultural works and crop production. If any year, the crop production is hampered due to different causes, her husband cannot save any money which they will spend for the crisis period. She mentioned, **“as my cow gave birth to a calf, I will have some extra money by selling the milk. I am cheerful now and I have no worries in the coming days”**.





COW REARING



“Woman Can also Earn like Men Members of Household”

Sree Bimola Roy (35) has previous experiences to nurture domestic animals and for that BDRCS prioritised her to provide financial support (BDT 17,000) for cow rearing. Her household is dependent on agricultural tasks as her husband is involved in cultivating his own small number of lands and most of the times in other lands in the whole year. She described, **“my household needs struggle to lead a happy and smooth life. Besides, I have a physically handicap girl who often used to make her worried about her future. But now, I have an asset as the cow will give a calf after 6 months and I will have regular earnings by selling milk of the cow. I think, woman can also earn like men members of the household”**.





GOAT REARING



“My Goats like My baby, My Future”

Renu Bala (60) is a widow of Kachukata Union, Nilphamari received financial support from BDRCS considering her economic and social vulnerability, she gave attention to rear goats. She stated, “I have two kids of the goat that I have been rearing in the last six months. I treat this goat and the two kids as an asset to use for the future. The other household members are giving importance me while taking decisions for familial matters which makes me proud and happy”.





SEEDS BANK



“Established Unique Seeds Business Boosted up My Household Status”

Jaheda Begum (36) received seed bank support (cash grant and orientation to market linkage) under EERW Programme which is helping her to earn BDT 5,000 to 6,000 per month. She said, “**now I have a very good idea about the business and price of the seeds and species products as I obtained practical knowledge on market linkage. I usually go to Upazila and district level shops to collect varieties of products so that the customers can get the best products from me. I established myself as a unique seeds and species businessman which has made me economically empowered**”.





HANDICRAFTS

“I Have Purchased Smiley Face of My Household Members Through Handicrafts Activities”

Mamota Banu (35) has been earning BDT 8,000 to 9,000 utilizing the EERW Programme support on handicraft. BDRCS provided the handicrafts beneficiaries financial support and experiential training linking to the market. She mentioned, **“now I have capacities to prepare suitable customer-oriented shari, three-pitch and other cloths by pasting batik and sells these products both in my own community and in other areas like Nilphamari Sadar and Saidpur Towns. Me along with husband goes to the Rangpur city to buy the raw cloths and materials at a reasonable price. And then I prepare the customer-oriented products, and I have good sales centring different types of festivals. I have invested the earnings in my household purposes like education for her children, repairing homes, latrines, and tube wells”.**





HANDICRAFTS



“I Have Spent My Earning for Husband’s Treatment”

Salma Akter (35) has got financial assistance and training under the handicrafts support of EERW Programme. She had financial constraints as her husband used to carry out agricultural and masonry works. She said, “**my husband used to earn inadequate money as he had physical sickness. I have also limited access to the working opportunities for earning money. But now I can earn BDT 1,000 per month by preparing carpets and selling these to the community people and in local markets. I collect the raw materials (bag and yarn) from the local market and prepare the carpets. I have given a significant portion of money earning earnings for the treatment purpose of my husband. I am also saving some money to buy domestic cattle to rear for extra earning in the coming days**”.





SMALL BUSINESS

খান



গ্রামীণ নারীর অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষমতায়ন কর্মসূচি

ক্ষুদ্র ব্যবসার জন্য আর্থিক

উপকারভোগীর নাম: মোছাঃ রাহা

গ্রাম: ৬নং ওয়ার্ড, মাঝাপাড়া, কচুকাটা ইউনিয়ন

বাংলাদেশ রেড ক্রিসেন্ট সোসাইটি,



www.bdrcc.org

“My Small Business is My Hope”

Rabeya Khatun’s (36) husband is a seasonal migrant worker who works in different places of Bangladesh round the year. She described, “though my husband had a small shop but that was not enough to generate money to run our household’s expenditure. When I got the support from BDRCS, then I enlarged the grocery business. I repaired the shop and brought new products that had good demand among the local customers. By this, now I have a monthly BDT 6,000 to 7,000 income. Now my grocery is the hub of business, and some other businessmen are making business being motivated from my success”.





SMALL BUSINESS



“I have Expanded my Business by Utilizing the Support of BDRCS”

Monnuja Begum (40) is a widow of Bandor Para, Kachukata Union who got financial support for small business by BDRCS. She lost her husband a few years ago and she had to struggle to lead life with her a son and a daughter. She described, **“though I managed to get married my only daughter, but I still require efforts to run household’s expenses. Though I used to run a small business grocery, that was not enough for me to carry my son’s education and the costs of the household. When I got support under the EERW Programme then I had an opportunity to enlarge the grocery business. Now I have monthly BDT 4,500 to 5,000 income from the grocery which is helping me to lead life smoothly. Now I have an extended grocery which is helping me to lead a balanced life”**.



গ্রাম: ১নং ওয়ার্ড, হঠাৎ পাড়া কচুকাটা ইউনিয়ন, নীলফামারী
বাংলাদেশ রেড ক্রিসেন্ট সোসাইটি, নীলফামারী ইউনিট



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SMALL BUSINESS

“BDRCS’s Programme has Ensured Women Empowerment”

Shefali Begum (29) lives in a remote area of Kachukata Union of Nilphamari whose husband is a Van puller. Shefali got financial support under EERW Programme and now, she is doing small business at her home. She said, **“every month, I am earning around BDT 5,000 from my home-based grocery which is helping me to have a happy life. I have utilized the earned money in repairing houses and the grocery. I am investing the money for the educational purposes of my two children. I perceived BDRCS’s Programme has ensured women empowerment. I realized that the programme has contributed a lot to create sensitization, awareness and learning motivation among the women of this area for the women to make them economically empowered”**.





FISH CULTIVATION

“Fishes from Own Ponds, Fulfilled my Household Nutrition, and Increased Income”

Rokeya Begum (33) and her husband did not buy any type of fish in the last one year as they have been cultivating different types of fishes in two ponds by using the financial support of BDRCS. She said, **“nowadays, the price of fish is very high at the market as there are scarcities of sufficient fishes in this area. But when I had got support from BDRCS then I started cultivating fishes at the two ponds. In the last one year, I sold fish for BDT 8,000 and my household members have been eating the fish from the ponds. The EERW Programme has significantly contributed to make the women as financially empowered by which women like me are earning money and utilizing the money for their household purposes”**.





TECHNICAL TRAINING

“Technical Training Inspired me to Think Better for my Future”

Monisha Akter Mina (23) has been providing voluntary services to the RCRC movement through Nilphamari RC Unit since 2017. There are many skills gained through engagement with different operations under Nilphamari Unit. Being a female RCY she received 9 months long training on ‘Computer Graphics Design’ from Technical Training Centre, Nilphamari and learned different skills on graphics design. The skills of graphic design have created opportunity to earn money through completion of different design activities. Currently she is earning average BDT 8,000 by selling skills. She said, “I have learned how to design Logo, Banner, Clock, Certificate etc. I also have learned about Cartoon Design. There is huge demand of quality designer in the local market here, in Nilphamari. I am working and earning money at this moment, but I want to work in a wider market like online base freelancing and want to build my better future. Thanks, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society for giving the opportunity to build my better future”.



Economic Empowerment of Rural Women Programme

Key achievements



511

people received cash support for livestock (poultry, goat, cow)



283

people received orientation on sexual and gender-based violence prevention



239

people received cash support for vegetable gardening



103

people linked with local and union, and upazila market via linkage workshop



79

people received cash support for tailoring, handicraft, and small business



197

courtyard sessions conducted on sexual and gender-based violence



7

people received cash support for fisheries



10

women forums formed at union and ward level



5

people received cash support for nursery and seed bank



9

revolving funds formed at ward level



The two-year-long programme is being implemented in Kachukata union of Sadar Upazila in Nilphamari district





For any further information, please communicate with Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Department, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), 684-686, Red Crescent Sarak, Boro Moghbazar, Dhaka-1217, Bangladesh.