

Promoting Gender Equality and Balancing Equal Benefit for Women and Men

Solidaridad's Initiative to Promote Productive Engagement of Women in Agriculture in the Southwest Bangladesh



Be Bold for Change

International Women's Day

March 2017



Solidaridad

Solidaridad along with partners addressing the gender gap in agriculture and food supply chain and shaping better life & livelihoods of women in the Southwest Bangladesh

This brief projects snap shot of Sustainable Agriculture, Food Security and Linkages (SaFaL) project of Solidaridad towards promoting productive engagement of women in agriculture and balancing benefit from the productivity. SaFaL has been undertaking gender inclusive approach to shape the life and livelihoods of women in agriculture as farmer and as entrepreneurs. Women's leadership capacity as farmer, as an innovator for social agri-business is being facilitated for achieving gender equality and positioning in social and economic development processes. Solidaridad will continue the gender responsive approach to address the gender gap for promoting inclusive and equitable engagement of women and men in sustainable agriculture and businesses. Consideration would be given on the different priorities and interest of women and men. The approaches would be:

- Developing women's agency and relations for the adoption and adaptation of technologies, access to information and finance;
- Understanding the gender differentiated value and use of time and resources of women and men;
- Promoting men's and women's equal rights and entitlements on land, water and eco-system services;
- Developing women's leadership and decision-making ability for their inclusive engagement in agriculture, small businesses, productive employment and decent work.



“We salute to thousands of women in our communities moving ahead and determining to change their lives”. Solidaridad observed the Women's Day with the women farmers.

Milita, a Women Mango Farmer of Satkhira, Bangladesh inspiring other Women to Enter into Contract Farming

Milita Mondol (37), a mango farmer from the village of Beli in Kolaroa, Satkhira has emerged as a leading women producer of safe mango. A member of the SaFaL horticulture producer group, she received training in Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) and took part in a pilot for contract farming for mango production in 2015. She applied good farm management practices facilitated by SaFaL in her 33 decimals of mango orchard. She applied proper and timely



pruning, fencing, plowing, use of vermin compost, recommended doses of fertiliser and bio-pest management such as pheromone trap. Milita said, 'earlier, the production in our orchard was low because of poor farm management and improper use of fertiliser and chemicals. Through the contract farming facilitated and supported by Solidaridda SaFaL project, we succeeded in reducing use of pesticides by around 60%. Last year, with support from SaFaL and concerned government officials, we produced 870 kilograms of safe mango, which has been purchased by a leading exporting agency at BDT 37,000. Earlier, I had little idea about commercial mango production. Thanks to SaFaL, now I know how to run it like a business and make good profit through contract farming directly with the exporters. The relationship I have built with the buyers will help me expand my mango production.' Milita, with support from Solidaridad, is continuing the contract farming with the exporters for production of safe mango. Her success as a mango producer and seller has inspired three other women in the locality to start mango production. Following this trend, the number of women mango producer will go up in the future, Milita hopes.

Women are emerging as entrepreneur- the success of Protima Rani

Like most other areas of Bangladesh, the southwest is also characterised by low participation of women in commercial activities. They have traditionally been confined to their households, engaged in share and care giving. **Pratima Rani Saha** (28), a spouse of a SaFaL member of Paikgacha, Khulna started making Aton – trap for harvesting shrimps with her husband's inspiration and support and motivation from SaFaL. She received



training and business development support from SaFaL for making *atons*. In two years' time, her business has expanded considerably. For instance, she made 220 *atons* in 2015, which has grown to 878 in 2016. She is now

earning a net profit of BDT 61,460 per annum. Pratima is thankful to SaFaL for helping her to better shape her life and livelihoods. She has saved some money for giving her children better education. She is also planning to rent a *gher* for shrimp culture. She urges other women to follow her example and start a business. 'In this way, women will be economically and socially empowered and will be able to contribute in their family well-being,' Pratima said.

China is a role model in Palasi village

China Mondol (35) is a member of Palashi Daspara Vegetables producer group (PG). She received a range of training on safe vegetable production as well as the production and use of vermin compost. This helped her boost vegetable production in her own field at a much reduced cost. China also set up her own business of vermin compost production and sell. Presently, China is one of the leading vermin compost producers in the locality. She sells vermin compost to fellow vegetable growers as well as at an input shop located in her village. China's earning from vermin compost selling is increasing steadily, which has enabled her to improve her lifestyle.



'My income has given me a strong voice in family matters and an improved status in the society,' China informed. She has managed to buy some much-needed furniture in her house and make some savings. China hopes that her success will encourage other PG members, especially women, to start vermin compost production and achieve self-reliance.

SaFaL is Positioning Women as Farmer-The Story of Sritikana Paul

Sritikana Paul, a member of Mandiarchar Fresh water Shrimp Producer Group Executive Committee in Narail Sadar, has made her mark as an enterprising farmer. Since being involved with SaFaL, Sritikana has improved her farm production by applying the techniques and technologies promoted by SaFaL. Sritikana is the mother of two daughters, both of whom are studying at the college level. With assistance from her husband, Sritikana maintains a *gher* on 60 decimals of land, which previously suffered from under-production and high mortality of fish seeds. With the application of Good Aquaculture Practices (GAqP) and technologies like the use of



probiotics, Sritikana and her husband have been able to increase the yield almost three times – from 1-1.5 kg/decimal, to 3.5 kg/decimal. She sells her produces to the nearby Mulia Collection Centres established by SaFaL, which has been a great boon for the shrimp farmers of the locality. The farmers get fair price and fair weight, through responsible sourcing directly linked with an export company. Sritikana also cultivates vegetables in the dike of the *gher* that she use for home consumption as well sell to the market. The income from the increased yield of prawn and vegetables has contributed to better livelihood for Sritikana and her

family. She is now planning to expand the gher area so that the production could be further enhanced. Sritikana believes that everybody, whether men or women, has the same potential to build his/her own fortune. This only requires hard work, dedication, willingness to learn and take challenge.

Latisan became an expert vegetable farmer

Skills and technologies acquired from the SaFaL project has enabled **Latisan Begum** to earn respect and recognition from the society. Latisan's family has a vegetable garden where she grows a range of vegetables. When she first told her husband to use her newly learned technologies in their vegetable garden, her husband was reproachful, 'I know all about farming. So let me follow my own method.' But Latisan was persistent. After being able to increase production by applying some of the technologies she advocated (like vermin compost and Pheromone Trap), Latisan's husband now convinced and let her play a more active role in gardening. These days, her husband fully relies on her for gardening and takes guidance from her whenever he faces problem. Latisan's active contribution has substantially increased the production in their garden and reduced pre and post-harvest losses. Latisan has also earned respect from other vegetable farmers, who takes advice from her frequently.



A successful community leader, a skilful lead farmer



Nila Rani Biswas (52) has been acting as the Lead Farmer (LF) of two SaFaL since 2013. A series of trainings offered by SaFaL has enabled her and other LFs to achieve wide ranging skills and capabilities. Nila regularly conducts training sessions for the producer group (PG) members and offers guidance and advisory services. Over the last three years, she worked hard to mobilise farmers for selling prawns to Mulia Prawn Collection Centre linked with the processing companies established by SaFaL, which helps the farmers get good price and accurate weight for their produces. Nila also assists SaFaL Community Nutrition Volunteers (CNVs) to provide important nutrition messages and basic healthcare services to the PG members. In the last UP election, Nila has been elected as a Member of the Union Parishad. 'SaFaL has instilled confidence and leadership qualities in me. I want to use this for the betterment of the condition of women in the society,' she says.

Smriti Mollik wants to be an ideal commercial farmer

Smriti Mullick, one of the women members of SaFaL Milk Producer Group in Narail has successfully adopted the technology of hydroponic fodder production and increased the milk production of her cows while reducing the cost of cattle rearing. Hydroponic is a farmer and climate smart technology for producing fodder without soil, in water. It is especially suitable for women, who can manage the system easily in addition to their daily chores as it can be produced using narrow spaces in homesteads. Besides, the production cycle takes only 9 days and can be done year-round without worrying about rain or bad weather. The fodder is also rich in nutrients which would meet the nutrition requirements of the cattle significantly.



Smriti Mullick produces hydroponic fodder in a makeshift shed in her courtyard with support from SaFaL. By feeding hydroponic fodder, Smriti has been able to increase the milk production of her cow by around 3 kilograms per cow. Smriti said, 'Now I am feeding only 3 kilograms of concentrate feed to each cow instead of 7 kilograms that I fed previously, thus saving BDT 120 each day. With the increase in milk production and saving from commercial feed, I am now saving around BDT 250 per cow per day.' The increased profitability has brought about more comforts in Smriti's family. Smriti hopes that, hydroponic fodder will bring about significant changes in the dairy sector, especially for those who have inadequate land and for women.

"I had no income before I started vermin compost production and selling. Now I'm earning, and spending money for my family's well-being such as paying the electricity bill, purchasing my necessary things etc. In terms of women's less advancement in society, she thinks early marriage and less awareness on health and nutrition are the crucial issues. I make a decent income from selling vermin compost, which has enabled to improve her social and economic standings. Luna firmly believes that, economic empowerment leads to empowerment in other sectors for women in the society."



In her view, SaFaL's nutrition sessions and behaviour change campaigns led by the CNVs have raised critical awareness in the society and have made the society a better place for women. She believes, now early marriage has reduced and employment opportunity of women has been increased as a result of women's empowerment. SaFaL taught us through nutrition sessions about the bad effect of early marriage. There was superstition that pregnant women should not take much more food that may become problem during delivery, but now we have learned that pregnant woman needs a balanced diet. 'Now there is greater awareness in the society about the rights of the women, which is benefitting hundreds of women like me every day.'

- Luna Biswas, a young SaFaL women vegetables producers and vermin compost entrepreneur.

Jolly Mondol (40), a member of SaFaL producer group in Manirampur Upazila, Jessore believes that, the wave of change initiated by SaFaL will eventually touch the lives of millions of people, particularly women, and will make the society a better place for women and other disadvantaged groups. She said, 'In the past, my previous



generations such as my grandmother, my mother and my mother-in-law were confined to the household. They could hardly step outside. But with the increasing awareness and spread of literacy, women can now venture outside for taking part in many kinds of activities, including jobs and businesses.' Women's increasing participation in various SaFaL programmes like training sessions, PG meetings, exposure visits etc. has enabled them achieve social, economic and political empowerment. 'Women's role in PG governance has been appreciated by all, which is really encouraging,' she said. The knowledge, skills and confidence acquired from SaFaL will help women achieve a stronger place in all spheres of life in the future, she believes.

Together we can make a huge difference

Parul (40), an inhabitant of Dodaria village of Manirampur, Jessore left Bangladesh a few years ago with her husband and two children for India in search of a better life. However, they experienced great hardship in India and failing to change their fortune, came back home. They started vegetable farming for a living. In 2014, Parul joined SaFaL as a PG member of the Didaria Horticulture PG and received a range of training on safe vegetables production and post-harvest management. This changed her fortune and soon she emerged as a successful vegetable grower in her locality. Now Parul and her husband are producing vegetables in 65 decimals of leased land. 'SaFaL introduced technologies have enabled me to increase tomato production by almost 100 percent and, thanks to the linkage support provided by SaFaL, she now sells her produces to a super shop in Jessore town. 'Just a few years ago, I had nothing but hardship and sufferings. But now, I have been able to bring smiles to my children and give them good education. My husband and I work hard in out garden and our income is steadily increasing.' She hopes that her example will inspire other disadvantaged women to follow in her footsteps.'



Arati Biswas and **Merry Biswas**, two enterprising women from Narail, have made examples for other women by transforming themselves from simple housewives to competent aquaculture farmers, working shoulder-to-shoulder with their husbands. Arati, a member of Sitarampur Tilapia PG piloted FAST variety of Tilapia in freshwater and have achieved success. It has improved her financial standings and she has planned to scale the production in the coming days. 'My hard work and dedication has amazed my fellow men and women PG members,' she said. 'This has also inspired other women PG members to start Tilapia production. On the other hand, Merry, a member of the Goakhola Pashchim Para Gola



PG has successfully used Probiotic in Gola-Carp mixed culture. 'Initially, I just helped my husband by taking part in some simple tasks. But gradually, my contribution increased, which has added real value to our farming. Now, Merry and her husband work in their farm and sharing all the farming work. 'Our production has increased as is our financial status,' Merry said. 'I have proved that, women are not only passive helpers, but also active workers and decision makers, which creates real and significant value.'

SaFaL CNVs are emerging as health and nutrition entrepreneurs- The story of Kakoli Begum and Krishna Rani Kabiraj

SaFaL developed Community Nutrition Volunteers (CNVs) have been making good contributions in the society not only by improving the health status of the larger cross-sections of people, but also raising critical awareness on matters of health, nutrition, sanitation and proper lifestyle. **Kakoli Begum**, a SaFaL CNV working in Narail has succeeded in building a good reputation in the society by providing much-needed services like health check-up, advisory service and awareness raising. She has developed good working relationship with government medical centres, physicians and health service providers. By leveraging this relationship, Kakoli has been able to build linkages between the service providers and the disadvantaged people, especially women, living in different areas of Narail. Her reputation prompted the government officials from the Department of Livestock Services to train her as a Community Livestock Service Provider (CLSP). Equipped with the training, Kakoli now also works as a CLSP and provides primary veterinary services like cattle health check-up, de-worming, AI, etc. She has become well-known in the community and everyday many people consult her for her services. 'If women are properly equipped and motivated, they can do a better job than men in most sectors. I have proved that and I hope other women will get inspiration from my achievements,' Kakoli said.



Krishna Rani Kabiraj, another Community Nutrition Volunteer (CNV) of SaFaL working in Paikgacha, Khulna, has achieved fame as a reliable health service provider, as the number of people relying on her services and advice is increasing rapidly. Since starting work as a CNV in 2015, Krishna has gradually developed a strong network with local health clinics and hospitals as well as government and non-government health workers. She keeps close contact with pregnant and lactating mothers from 7 to 8 villages. She receives frequent phone calls from people,



especially women, seeking advice on health, nutrition and relevant issues. Krishna is always on the move. For traveling to distant places, she uses rented motor cycle. 'We have made a lot of progress in behavioural change on health and other matters. Child mortality rate in our area has substantially decreased while the occurrences of early marriage and other social problems also are on the decline. Community people in general and women in particular are highly sensitised on health related issues. Adolescent girls actively take part in the quarterly nutrition sessions of the PGs, which have paved the ways for more awareness at the family level on health, nutrition and SRHR issues. 'Krishna's technical knowledge and skills on health and nutrition has enabled her to provide technical assistance to the private practitioner doctors in checking blood pressure and blood sugar of their patients. This has broadened the scope of earning money, she now can spend more money on her college going son and school going girl's education. Her family is very supportive to her activities and sharing the household level activities, which enabled her to perform her new work effectively. 'Working as a CNV has empowered me socially and economically, but that's not all, the real satisfaction is as a human being. I am able to position myself in the family and the community, making contributions for my family's well-being as well as for the community, by improving health and nutrition status,' Krishna said.

Mithu Rani and many other entrepreneurs of SaFaL are promoting availability and equal access to quality inputs and farm management services for the rural communities of Bangladesh

Mithu Rani, one of the Lead Farmer and entrepreneur of SaFaL has established herself as a reliable supplier of cattle feed for the livestock producers in rural Bangladesh. Mithu's journey as an entrepreneur is full of ups and



downs and she is still facing a lot of difficulties. But she never lost faith in herself. With great self-belief and determination, she has coped with problems like sudden transportation cost and price hikes, steep competition and ever-changing demands from an increasing client base. In spite of the opening of two new shops in her neighbourhood, Mithu's clients still prefer to collect cattle-feed from her because she is always ready to offer extra help to make life easier for them. Mithu's role as Lead Farmer gives her an additional leverage to keep her client base intact and expand it. 'People can reach me day and night and I never say 'no'. Because this is not just a business to me. I consider it as a call of duty,' Mithu said.

Mithu Rani's confidence as an entrepreneur has significantly increased. She is now trying to set up an input shop in a nearby bazaar to better shape her business. 'This will help me increase the number of my clients

substantially because then people from three more villages will buy inputs from me.’ She is consulting with SaFaL for managing a loan of BDT 100,000 from a local partner NGO of Solidaridad. Mithu Rani believes that this loan will give her business a strong footing for future growth. ‘I feel proud because I am an entrepreneur,’ Mithu said. ‘I am doing something, which very few women in my community can do. I hope my success will provide inspiration for other to engage in similar ventures.’



..... Solidaridad is determined to forge a better working environment and culture in the societies and workplaces to embrace a more inclusive, gender-equal world.



LET US ALL TRY TO BE "HUMAN", RATHER THAN "MAN" OR "WOMAN"

Solidaridad, with support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN), is implementing the Sustainable Agriculture, Food Security and Linkages (SaFaL) project in the southwest Bangladesh. SaFaL is supporting 58,492 smallholder farm households, disadvantaged landless workers for adoption of sustainable value chain based farming practice in three sub sectors (livestock, aquaculture and horticulture).

For more information please contact: Mr. Selim Reza Hasan, Country Manager, Solidaridad Network Asia. Apartment # A1 Merrydale (1st Floor), House # 32, Road # 10/A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1209, Bangladesh, Email: selimr@solidaridadnetwork.org, Web: www.solidaridadnetwork.org