

STORIES OF TRANSFORMATION



CARE Bangladesh Human Interest Story Competition 2019



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Renewed confidence and attitude gave Sangkori an extra edge in expanding her market

By Shahidullah Ahmed

Sangkori hails from a remote location of Sunamganj district. CARE-GSK CHW Initiative trained her to become Community Skilled Birth Attendant (CSBA). However, her struggle continued and she had to encounter a number of difficulties while reaching out to client base. Her fellow health workers who attended the training program were married. On the other hand, Sangkori was young and unmarried. People in the locality didn't take it very well that a young, unmarried woman would take up this kind of job. It was difficult as well as risky for her to make delivery calls at night. To her dismay, even pregnant women didn't want to get enlisted for her service due to her marital status.

The communication system was too poor and traveling to places on boats was expensive. Her travel expenses turned out to be higher than what she received as remuneration. At times, she thought of switching her profession.

Unlike other interventions, CARE-GSK CHWI team did not wrap up their responsibilities after training

ended. They monitored the progress of all Private CSBAs and established contact with frustrated participants like Sangkori. Soon they organized a Clinical Attachment training along with life skills, entrepreneurship skills trainings for Private CSBAs to help them expand their services.

After taking part in the ten-day-long training at District Hospital, Sangkori resumed her profession with a renewed spirit. Assisted by the CARE staff, she organized group discussions with pregnant women and their families. She discussed her delivery plans and maintained regular communication with pregnant women. She started a close communication with the community groups, health and family planning front line staff and local government representatives. Gradually pregnant women of her locality understood the benefit of skilled health services. It was possible when examples were set in situations where Sangkori contributed in saving lives of ailing mothers during complicated pregnancy cases. Whereas she delivered a single baby in 2016, she delivered at least 8 babies every month from July 2017 onward.

Speaking about her struggle, Sangkori said, “The same people who did not call me earlier now call me to take my service and advice. They respect me too, even though I am not married yet. I think it's important for every woman to have a career of her own.”

Sangkori was a successful social organizer, too. To inspire others, she declared many awards for community volunteers. She'd bought a mobile phone for a volunteer, which set an example among Private CSBAs. She'd also bought a motorcycle to respond to emergency calls during winter season, spending 40 thousand takas (\$470) from her earning and borrowing 8 thousand (\$94) from a fund created for the benefit of that sub district's Private CSBAs. Now she could visit any of her service-seekers without help from others.

Receiving CARE GSK's Private CSBA, Clinical Attachment trainings and other trainings related to entrepreneurship, Sangkori became a symbol of self-confidence and a role model to people in her community.



Sangkori gets on her bike every day to serve the community



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BEAUTY'S BEAUTY PARLOR: STRUGGLES FOR LIVELIHOOD

By Shemana Mollick

'To glorify someone's beauty in her most precious bridal day is my job. The day when a girl become lady in a moment is the most memorable moment of her life and my duty is to make the moment more memorable.' A 27 years old young beautician and entrepreneur Ms Beauty Akter was delighted to narrate her dreamy path to become a role model of an independent woman.

Beauty, the youngest child of her parents lost her father when she was only 18 months old baby and then had to lead a life full of struggles. Beauty completed her primary education from a nearby NGO run school and became confident in dance and music besides her school. Days was going fine but who knew the fate!

"I had no idea who husband or his family were! In my school days, I dreamt of being an educated girl to help my mother but I was married off forcefully due to so called society around me and the helplessness

**“I had to struggle a lot and waited a long time to see a good day. Sometimes I even lost the hope to live. But now I am happy. I earn 7-8 thousand taka a month. After all, it's my own institution, own income, my own liberty.”
Beauty said with confidence.**

of mother. We were poor and helpless, what could we do?” The lady who beautify girls in marriage was sharing her memories of marriage in such a way.

When she was only 15, she became a mother. Handling a drug addicted husband and new born baby at a time become a burden to her life. But she had to march forward in spite of all these as she was a mother. “What I hadn’t done? Sewing clothes, handicraft, teaching dance to the kids and whatever I had got to do, I did to survive.” She survived 10 years in such struggles. The earnings also didn’t last for long. She was at lost again, as her child was growing up.

In such a situation, she came to know about the community support group in ward 37, Kunia-Targach by HALOW+ project of CARE-Bangladesh. In 2016 she became a member of that group and started different training from the group. She then came to know about the rights she had. HALOW+ project provided training to 15 enthusiastic women to become a beautician. Beauty is one of them. At first she started working in a minimum scale in the training center of community support group but soon she realized to start something of her own. In association of the project she started her own beauty parlor and named it- Beauty’s beauty parlor.

Now she dreams to educate her child in a good school and rear him as a good human being. She is saving some money and planning to start a bigger parlor where many other girls like her will work there and will build their fate. Shirin and Nur Jahan, other two girls are also working with her to build their fortune.



27 year old, ever smiling Beauty tries to hide her trouble at work

Beauty is not an isolated story rather there are so many stories around us which requires support and motivations.



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MY LIFE, MY DECISION

By Sudeb Kumar Das

“Belonging a poor family, we were living in hand to mouth. I felt helpless and hesitated to ask my personal expenses always from my husband, even not getting proper importance in the family since I am not earning”--- Ms. Parul Begum (18) was expressing her hopeless and undignified life in this way.

Parul started her conjugal life about one year back and living with her in-laws and husband in Jakuapara village of Punchgachi Union under Kurigram Upazila. Parul completed Grade 8 and now is a complete housewife and her husband is a rickshaw puller. She is involved with Jakuapara Girls’ Collective (GC) group of IMAGINE project and regularly participating in the sessions from the beginning. Though her journey with this project was not smooth at all. To be enrolled in GC group, at first she slipped out at the family level to get permission from in-laws and husband. However, her indomitable will and strong determination, helped her to overcome all the barriers and finally involved her in Jakuapara GC group. Being an ordinary housewife, how she crossed the boundary of husband’s home. Let’s hear the story from her own voice.

“At first, my in-laws and husband refused to permit for me to attend the GC session. Being a housewife, if you move outside the home, neighbors will take it negatively, and gossip. Better you stay at home.” GC club is situated very close to my home. But as I did not get permission, couldn’t attend few sessions at the beginning. One day I escaped from home and attended in GC session. Field Facilitator (FF) Nazma



Parul, with her family

Khatun gave me a brief on IMAGINE Project. At the first day in GC session, I got an overview on health and economic perspective of early first birth. In addition, FF shared that project will provide trainings to adolescents which will help the people to engage in income generating activities. This unique idea of the project grabbed my attention. Returning back to home, I explained the project

nature to my mother-in-law and husband. I said to mother-in-law that I joined in session, project will provide training to the adolescent girls so that girls can be self-dependent. As a female, in each month I need some hand cash, I can't seek that always to your son. Your son is the only earning member and it's a huge pressure for him to cover all expenses. After getting training, if I can earn and contribute at least BDT 500 to the family expenses that would be a great support for your son too. After hearing all of the logical explanations my mother-in-law said --- OK, if you think joining in GC is beneficial for you, then do that."

To join in GC group, Ms. Parul had to happily disallow the bad tones of neighbors. By attending in various sessions, she learnt on reproductive health rights, family planning methods, health and economic perspectives of early first birth, problem solving skills, effective communication, family budgeting, market research and value addition. In the "goal setting" session, she illustrated her future dream. She wants to create a new example in the community as an entrepreneur of mobile retailing and repairing in future. From the intense desire to turn around, she participated in aspiration workshop of vocational training. Observing her keen interest, field facilitation Nazma Khatun enrolled her in another activities of IMAGINE Project named "Couple Counseling". Couple Counselling (CC) helps couple to maintain happy conjugal life and to plan prosperous future. From couple counseling, Parul Begum and her husband learnt on family planning, planning for prosperous future, economic management of family and perfect time to have a baby etc.

Attending in couple counseling sessions, Parul Begum found the power of taking decisions by breaking all traditional social norms which is a milestone of women empowerment. Parul stated, "after marriage, in-laws were continuously pressurized me to take baby very soon. From GC & CC sessions I learnt about the risk of early pregnancy. Sometimes due to complications baby dies, or sometimes mother dies. If it happens then in-laws will blame me as cachectic bride. I want to involve myself in economic activity now. If I take baby now, it might hinder my generating activities, as I need to spend time in taking care of the child. With a poor income how will I bear the expenses of my child along with our daily expenses? It's our responsibility as parents to create a secured and solvent future for our child. In the counseling session, when I played prosperity game with along with my husband and mother-in-law, at that time I realized if I delay first birth, that will be physically and economically beneficial for me even for my family. After that CC session, I told my mother-in-law and husband, I will not take baby so early. My Life, My Decision. I will be self-dependent first, then after being financially solvent I will think of baby. Since they participated in CC session and played the game, they could not disagree with me. After marriage, for the first time, I

took my life-decision independently and when they agreed with me, I felt honored and proud. Now they are not pressurizing me to take baby anymore. They encouraged me to chase my dream and will continue to support from their level best. I do not feel any pressure, any stress which I had earlier. Life became easier, so does my future involvement in economic activities.”



Parul in the session

Parul Begum now dreams to be economically empowered. After getting vocational training and involving in economic activity, she wants to have a prosperous future and build a better and comfortable house first. After ensuring a solvent future for upcoming generation, then she will plan for taking baby at least 2 years later. She wants to see herself as a “role model” of women empowerment in her community. And IMAGINE Project will be the “escort” in her journey of empowerment --- that’s her expectation.



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DODGING THE DEATH: KULSUM GETS A SECOND CHANCE IN HER LIFE

By Akram Ali

Kulsum Begum (55) lives in a small village of Bodorganj Upazila under Rangpur District with her husband and 4 children. Her husband is a van puller who struggle every day to properly feed and clothe the family with very poor income. Even the basic family needs such as health and education were a big challenge for them and because of poor nutrition they used to get sick more often but unable to avail proper treatment due to poor income and high medical expenses. They mostly rely on traditional healers and other improper means of medication. As Kulsum Begum says, “We don’t have money to go to Upazilla or District hospitals and community clinic often does not have complex treatment facilities and therefore we always leave our fate in the hand of Allah”. There are hundreds of other poor and disadvantaged families who would share the same fate as Kulsum for the same reason.

In November 2018, SDC-Shomoshti project initiates their operation in this area with local partner Gram Bikash Kendra (GBK) with a view to develop the market systems and ensure social services especially for the poor and disadvantaged population. After analyzing the problem the project starts to facilitate the community linkage with community clinics to ensure the health service coverage. But most of the

community clinics do not have state of art treatment facilities and the people have no other option but to go for Upazila or District level hospitals for better treatment which is both expensive and time consuming due to poor infrastructure and transportation system. Hence the project realizes the need of introducing health insurance which can solve the issue by helping the people in crisis period. Therefore based on the previous experience the project approach Pragati Life Insurance Company to introduce Micro Health Insurance (MHI) in that area and signs a MoU with the company. With BDT 1100 premium the targeted households would get crucial health service coverage for five household members for one year. The project also deploys Micro Health Volunteers who would look for people in need of that service. Additionally the MHI volunteers would get required training and commission based on premium from the insurance company.

Few people from the targeted area take the premium for better service and future and Kulsum was one of them. 3-4 months after talking the premium one day Kulsum rushed to a doctor of Prime Medical College and Hospitals with unbearable pain in her abdomen. Prime Medical was an affiliated hospital of Pragati Life Insurance Company. After diagnosis the doctor finds that she has Uterus Turner Infection which is a complex disease and often turns into uterus cancer. The doctor advices her to go under an operation which would costs her around BDT 20,000. This was a big amount for Kulsum for saving her life and at that moment the health insurance coverage of Kulsum comes into play. With the insurance she gets coverage of BDT 17,000 which is 85% coverage of the total cost. With that coverage she gets the operation done and returns home with good health and smiling face. As she says, “At first I thought I am going to die. The pain was so unbearable and I was losing my hope. The health insurance was a lifesaver and without the coverage it was almost impossible for my family to bring me back from the face of death. I will always be grateful to Shomoshti project and Pragati Life Insurance. Taking the premium was the best decision of my life to save my life”.



Kulsum Begum (55), in front of her house in Bodorganj, Rangpur with new hope in her face.

After realizing the benefit in front of the eyes other community people are also taking premium for securing their future. So far 379 households purchased the premium which covers around 1800 people and growing. It is a great example of how a small initiative can create a larger impact. Shomoshti is helping hundreds of other poor and disadvantaged people like Kulsum to access improved health services by introducing inclusive solution system bringing the private sectors to the reach of bottom of the pyramid population.



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LOVE FOR WORK BRINGS HONOUR FOR SONA RANI ROY

By Syed Murtaza Jahangir

Master Artisan Sona Rani Roy lives in Chiribondor of Dinajpur district of Northern Bangladesh, famous for lush green agriculture zone, adorned with years old temples, making it a place of heritage for South Asia.

Sona Rani Roy comes from a farmers' family, who are also traditionally skilled in quilting. Like any rural woman in Bangladesh, she also learned the technique from her mother, a skill that has been passed on to generations for hundreds of years.

This Master Artisan lives with her classic-Bengal joint family, with her son and also her in-laws. The adult men are farmers, while the women of the family work as farmers during the harvesting period and as quilter for the rest of the year.

Besides doing domestic chores, women like Sona Rani are multi-taskers and efficient. She usually takes five to six months to complete one piece of 'white on white (WoW)' quilt. These quilts made by master

artisans are works of art and pride of Living Blue. A typical (230cm x 180cm) WoW quilt would be patiently weaved in delicate patterns running over about 11 kilometers of white thread, depicting intricate quilting of tradition and life.

Sona Rani Roy happens to be a **Director in the NCVI board**, parent company of the brand Living Blue, representing the quilters of from Dinajpur district. Her passion for making quilts made her one of the short-listed finalists for the **Loewe Craft Prize 2017**, for her work, **“White on White-Moyur”** quilt in 2017. The design featured patterns of a peacock spreading its feathers that took her three months to complete.

“I do my work with utmost sincerity. It means a lot to me if someone likes my work, and being a finalist for this award is indeed a huge recognition for me.”- Said Sona Rani.

According to its website, the Loewe Craft Prize is an annual international prize recognizing an outstanding work of craftsmanship that pairs an original artistic concept with a modern application of traditional methods.

Sona has been selected as one of the 26 finalists from 3,951 craft submissions from around the world.

The award is given out by the Spain-based **Loewe Foundation**. Loewe is owned by **Louis Vuitton - LVMH**.



The Moyur quilt by Sona Rani that made its place in the LOEWE Craft Prize out of 3,951 craft submissions.



Sona Rani representing Bangladesh in International Folk Art Market – 2014 in Santa Fe, NM, USA.

The master artisan of Living Blue has been awarded with ‘Anannya Top Ten 2018 Awards’ for her role in taking Bangladesh high-handcraftsmanship to international stage, being a finalist in Loewe Craft Prize 2017, and as a mentor to other artisans in Living Blue. This is a highly reputed award, since 1993, given out by the fortnightly magazine published from Ittefaq Group.

Sona Rani also took part in the **Santa Fe International Folk Art Market in the US in July 2014**. The woman who has a very few occasions of visiting Dhaka, the capital

city, has visited the USA twice in 2014 and 2018 to represent Bangladesh and its high craftsmanship to international audience.

Working with Living Blue has transformed her from an ordinary homemaker to the one of the decision makers of the family. She has expanded her house from a small hut to a decent home with multiple rooms and a courtyard. The small hut where she used to live with her kids and husband is now being used as a storage for fire-woods.



Sona Rani's story was displayed at the entrance of National Museum, Dhaka on the day of Ananya award ceremony.



TACKLING TABOO

By Suraiya Sultana

“I was very friendly with my mother. But I got that news from someone else. I came to know that my mother is expecting another baby. I am 15 years old and a student of class 9 in Sachna Bazar high school. I have two younger brothers. My youngest brother is 7 years old. Being only daughter of my parents I used to get more affection and love from them. My 35 year old mother is a housewife. My father is 40 years old, who is a masonry. He also sells seasonal fruits sometimes. He has a temporary shop at Sachna Bazar. I used to share everything with my mother. I shared every discussion of fun center with her especially the menstruation related sessions. I told her how important personal hygiene practice is during menstruation. Even which boy likes me, which teases me; I also shared those stories with her. She also valued my choice and opinion”- says 15 year old Shawpna Akhter, one of the girls of Kukraporshi fun center of Tipping Point project (TPP). She continues to tell her story:

Nevertheless that news made me embarrassed. People from our neighborhood has started stigmatizing me by saying that I am already matured enough to be married off and seems like mother and daughter are going to be pregnant at a time. I felt guilty and started misbehaving with my parents especially with my mother. I had stopped sharing story with my mother. I have been thinking how they could do it. I felt shy to attend school and I became irregular at school.

Then one day I shared my distress with Arifa apa (Field Facilitator, TPP). She made me recall a fun center



Shawpna (15) with her mother (35)

session name “sexual and reproductive rights”. I have understood that every person has the right to take decision when s/he will have baby. It is not a matter of shy. Then I realize that I am mistaken. My mother did nothing wrong. My parent has their rights to take decision about that. I felt apologetic myself. I made promise to myself that I will take good care of my mother from now. Later on I made amity again with mother. By this time my mother became physically very weak. I have stated to help her in household works. I helped her to cook. I took care of my younger siblings. I have started attending school regularly. At some point my relationship with my mother has been recreated. We stitched tiny kantha (a Bengali traditional quilt)

together for new baby. My mother and I felt cheerful again. But the matter of sorrow is that my mother has miscarriage. The baby died. My mother had to admit to hospital for 10 days. Her health condition became severe. Now I am taking care of her. I am also supporting her psychologically.

Fun center sessions really helped me to understand my misunderstanding. Without those session’s learning I was not able to realize the situation.

(Shawpna Aktar, a 15 years old girl of Kukraporshi fun center of Tipping Point project. Kokraporshi is a village of Jamalganj Upazila under Sachna Bazar Union. It is 2 kilometer far from Sachna Bazar. It has one government primary village. 80% of its children are school going. But in case of sexuality they are concealed.)



Shawpna spending leisure time her mother

An Ambition in the Contrast of Natural and Social Challenges

By Mridha Rashedul Islam

During the rainy monsoon months, up to 70% of Bangladesh gets inundated, making it tough for coastal communities to rebuild their lives. At Koibortogati village in Shirajganj district, Rina Khatun can even stand in ankle-deep mud to provide quality inputs to her customers.

Rina Khatun, who previously used to be a typical housewife, now she is a prominent women franchisee of Krishi Utsho project. She is actively working in an area where natural calamities are a regular phenomenon. Being a woman working in this critical condition and making it a successful venture is very difficult at the village level. However, her spirit to overcome all odds gave her strength and built her hopes high to establish her own identity.

She has discern about the agro-input services of KU project and some extent of services on the natural and social barriers at rural part. Apart from that, an alternative way-out of income from her home. However, the biggest challenge was the stress of social taboo of her surroundings.

Meanwhile, KU has discussed with her family (especially, her husband) to start her own business with from home. Thus her husband became very compassionate of this initiative to build the home-based shop. Later on, Rina had proactively went to all the women farmer groups and convinced them to start the venture agro-Inputs from her home. Additionally, KU has conducted seminar and focus group discussion with the farmer on the benefit of one stop service solution and about Rina Khatun's venture. As KU is also following the Just In Time (JIT) approach to making her business successful in their locality.

In the year 2015, she has started her venture with KU and her initial income was BDT 950 (\$12/-) per month. Presently, her income has reached BDT 12000 (\$150/-). She is now increasing is business capital from some ration income after contributing for herself and her children as well as savings.

After successfully established her business in naturally challenged area of Bangladesh, Rina Khatun is now a known as a successfully entrepreneur and change agent role model of women in a patriarchal society. And reshaping the traditional norms and raising the voice of women.



Rina Khatun transformed from a rural women to a successful women entrepreneur.



An Inspiration and Dream Transformed Rafiqul's Life

By Salim Hosain

A spark of inspiration and strong bonding can ignite the flame to dream big. It can transform the lives of people living under oppression in society – people who struggle day to day to feed the mouths of their family members. A little help and act of random kindness can change the mind of many, and it inspires others to act boldly. Similarly, Md Rafiqul Islam became a trendsetter and became an inspiration for many youth groups. Born in Lebutola Upazila, Jessore district, a high school dropout, Rafiqul struggled in his early life only to support his family.

At an early age, Rafiqul was collecting vegetables from several farmers. He collated vegetables and transported them in the local markets. Meantime, he also played the role of ICT group leader at AESA. Due to the lack of linkages in the market, Rafiqul was facing challenges for increasing his income to support his family.

Recently, he collaborated with Krishi Utsho and Agricultural Extension Support Activity Project (Ag. Extension Project), which changed his future radically. KU founded that Lebutola farmers are struggling for the quantity and milk fat in the dairy sector. The prime reason was lesser knowledge on feed

management, technology, and moreover, support to the farmers. To mitigate the challenges of Labutola, KU selected Mr. Rafiqul as KU franchisee with BDT 6000 feed.

After six months of continuous support from the project end, KU improved his technical and business skills. Now he is doing business with seven groups, consisting of 30 – 35 male and female farmers, with a monthly turnover more than BDT 40000. Moreover, dairy farmers of Labriola are capitalizing and following his footsteps for new feed technology. Their milk productivity has increased, and as a result, they are receiving a better price for milk.



Rofiqul Feed Center, the KU Franchisee with the KU point of sales (PoS) application to manage daily transaction of his

In a random visit, when I talked to Rafiqul, I felt proud to know that our project's continuous effort helped him to understand about food security. He knows that only by becoming self-sustainable in his venture can make a more significant and long-lasting change in the vision of food security in Bangladesh. We, as a community, can solve this immense issue only by supporting ourselves. Nowadays, Rafiqul is proactively sharing this knowledge in his group.

It is delightful to see that Krishi Utsho's initiatives are bringing positive changes among the people, especially when Rafiqul became a change agent to his community by exchanging this valuable knowledge.

