



Feed the Future Bangladesh Women's Empowerment Activity (WEA) Empowering Women, Lifting Bangladesh



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I never thought I would have a business cultivating fish! But it has become a reality. My husband and I are fish farming in our own pond and are making a profit."

Rashida Begum, WEA Beneficiary and New Fish Farmer, Khulna District



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Rashida Begum lives in Alaipur Village, Ghatbogh Union, Rupsa Upazila in Khulna district, Bangladesh, with her husband and 5-year-old daughter.

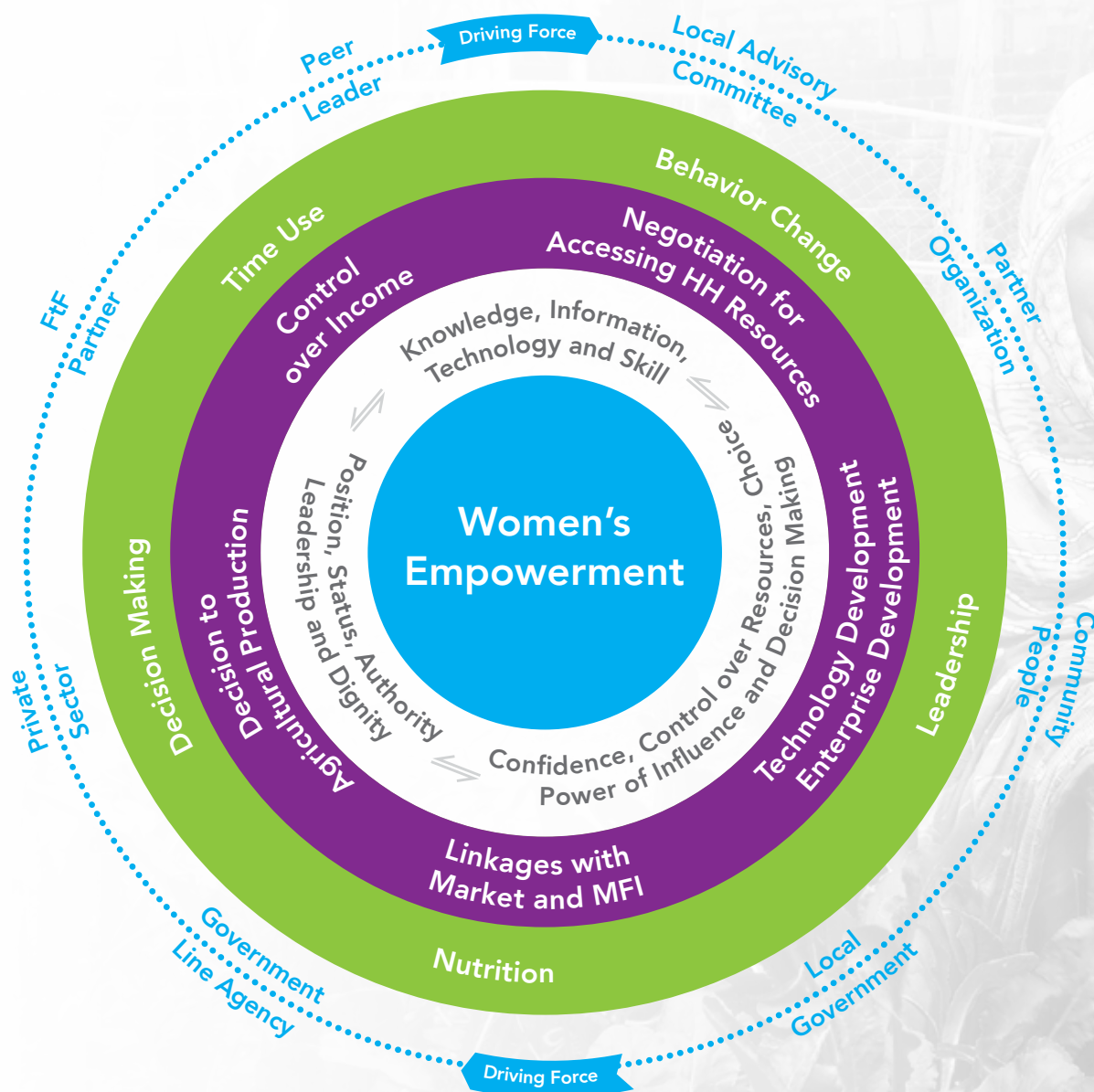
Before she became a beneficiary of the Feed the Future Bangladesh Women's Empowerment Activity (WEA) project, Rashida depended completely on her husband, who cultivated crops in his small field. His earnings were inadequate to provide a living for the family. Though Rashida dreamed of being educated and self-sufficient, this goal seemed impossible to reach. Like so many women in Bangladesh, she lacked control over resources and income in her family. Now, Rashida is among the 30,000 women who have received technical, entrepreneurial and life-skills training under the WEA project.

With WEA's help, Rashida and her husband began fish farming in their own pond, with an initial investment of Tk 52,000 (or \$650 USD) using a loan Rashida received from a microfinance institution. In her first production cycle, she sold Tk 85,000 worth of fish, and she expects to make Tk 150,000 on the remaining fish. This profit – nearly \$2,300 USD – has encouraged Rashida and her husband to plan on leasing a new pond to expand their fish cultivation.

WEA is an innovative three-year program which began in December 2014. Funded by USAID, the project works to improve gender parity and increase women's role and contributions to economic growth in Bangladesh.

WEA has piloted household- and community-level interventions which are leading to women's increased community leadership, strengthened decision-making over resources and agricultural production, and increased control over income. These key domains of women's empowerment have been proven to affect both agricultural productivity and food security for the better.

In partnership with local NGOs, the private sector and other stakeholders Winrock is working in five districts to support 30,000 women and 7,500 men in approximately 1,350 communities. By empowering women and their households socially and economically, WEA aims to increase agricultural production and food security while improving the well-being of beneficiaries.





PROJECT APPROACHES:

- **COMMUNITY-LED PLANNING AND MONITORING**

WEA adapted and employed Winrock's Community Asset Appraisal (CAA) tool to effectively enter communities. In each community, WEA held three-day CAA workshops, facilitated by WEA's local partner NGOs and Local Advisory Committees, community leadership groups developed and trained by WEA. The CAAs, which include focus group discussions, transect walks, and social mapping with a diverse and inclusive group of community members, have effectively mobilized targeted communities, enabling them to identify participants and create tailored, flexible plans which draw on local assets to overcome barriers to

equality. WEA has also used a community-led data collection tool, Agriculture Community Equity (ACE) Scorecard, to measure gender equity in targeted communities.

- **INTEGRATED ENTREPRENEURIAL LITERACY AND LIFE-SKILLS TRAINING**

Beneficiaries commit to a seven-month Entrepreneurial Literacy Training for Empowerment (ELTE) course, which develops entrepreneurial and agricultural skills while building basic literacy, numeracy and life skills. The course also promotes engaged discussions on women's empowerment, inequality and gender roles at household and community levels. Communities have demonstrated commitment by mobilizing daycare services for the children of participants, securing classroom space, and arranging house visits from Local Advisory Committee (LAC) members to ensure participating household buy-in and commitment.

- **ADVANCED TECHNICAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAINING**

WEA provides a two-day Agricultural Technical Training (ATT) to all 37,500 Entrepreneurial Literacy Training for Empowerment participants, as well as an additional three-day Entrepreneurship Development Training (EDT) for 500 women. These EDT participants are selected for business start-up support based on demonstrated commitment and their readiness to undertake entrepreneurial activities. These technology and market-centered activities are implemented and facilitated by Advanced Chemical Industries Ltd. (ACI), a Bangladeshi agribusiness company which has partnered with the project. This partnership has helped WEA beneficiaries establish linkages to both inputs and markets.

- **BEHAVIOR CHANGE COMMUNICATION (BCC) AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL LEADERS TO CHANGE THE PERCEPTION OF THE VALUE AND ROLE OF WOMEN**

WEA has adopted a social marketing approach to Behavioral Change Communication (BCC) using community events, radio broadcasting, engagement with journalists, distribution of communications material, and direct communications with households, local

government officials and community leaders through WEA staff and Local Advisory Committee (LAC) members. WEA's approach relies on the LACs established in each community. In conjunction with partner staff, the project supports LAC members to take leadership roles and champion change in their communities. In LACs, WEA trains groups to be Peer Leaders, leading activities to raise awareness and promote behavioral change; and Local Training Facilitators, delivering the project's core Entrepreneurial Literacy Training for Empowerment. WEA's Leadership for Change training supports LAC members in serving as effective and influential leaders in their community.

- **PARTNERING TO LEVERAGE TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND RESOURCES**

Through various collaborative activities (planning meetings, trainings, workshops, etc.) with USAID implementing partners under the Feed the Future program, as well as collaboration with government, international NGOs, local partners and the private sector, WEA and its partners have leveraged resources to address communities' needs.

A total of 2,918 guest speakers – government officials and local government representatives from various offices – visited Entrepreneurial Literacy Training for Empowerment classes in 31 upazilas in the five focus districts. Speakers provided information from the Citizen's Charter – a public manual explaining what government services are available, how they may be accessed, and how to make a formal complaint, as well as what specific support services are provided by their respective departments. LAC members and Peer Leaders played a vital role in establishing linkages with government offices and private sector participants to ensure that beneficiaries and communities received technical advisory services, ongoing cooperation and services through the social safety-net programs of the respective government agencies.

WEA works in partnership with four local NGOs – Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), SMKK (Sheba Manab Kallyan Kendra), Nabolok Parishad and SAINT Bangladesh – as well as the local agribusiness company ACI. While the NGOs support empowerment, the private sector brings technical expertise around agriculture, as well as experience with and access to inputs and markets. The project also closely coordinates with ongoing USAID projects, the Government of Bangladesh and development partners working in the same districts. By leveraging the strengths of these partners, WEA can better bring about social and economic empowerment.



KEY EMPOWERMENT ACHIEVEMENTS:

December 2014 – February 2017, project ends November 2017



Increased community leadership by women:

WEA beneficiaries show increased community leadership – 5,721 women beneficiaries have made at least one public presentation at the local or upazila level.



Improved time use by women:

6,571 women beneficiaries are receiving child care support, whether from family members or an alternative arrangement, to improve their time use.



Increased acceptance of women's empowerment:

9,584 beneficiary households report that each family member now has a balanced share of household responsibilities.



Strengthened decision-making by women in agricultural production:

Women are now able to purchase agricultural inputs and sell their products in the market independently. As a result of WEA intervention, 8,567 women (28.5 percent) now own productive assets.



Improved decision-making by women over productive resources:

42 percent of surveyed women beneficiaries report participating in decisions to buy, sell or transfer productive resources, and 65 percent of women beneficiaries are purchasing inputs through WEA linkages.



Improved women's control over income:

68 percent of women trained by WEA have savings accounts as a result of WEA assistance.

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS:

December 2014 – February 2017, project ends November 2017



Capacity building at community level:

1,500 community youth (768 women, 732 men) were selected and trained as Peer Leaders for behavior change and awareness-raising activities on WEA objectives and gender equality. As mobilizers, advocates and data collectors, the Peer Leaders are becoming an important resource for their communities, while building their own skills.



Women empowered to access services:

Over 20,500 women beneficiaries are receiving government and other support services related to women's rights, domestic violence victim support and access to resources through connections made by WEA-trained and supported Local Advisory Committee members.



Women and their households using new technology for improved agriculture:

28,667 beneficiary families have reported applying improved technologies as results of project interventions – entrepreneurial and life-skills training, technical training, demonstration plots, and mentoring by ACI field staff.



LESSONS LEARNED:

1

Effective participation of communities requires systematic and time-intensive orientation and engagement. Prior to the Community Asset Appraisal process, the WEA team held participatory inception workshops at the national, district and upazila levels, followed by project briefings at the union and community levels. In each community, WEA established Local Advisory Committees to ensure the availability of effective and influential leaders, who would support program activities at the household and community levels. The CAA process also included selection of Entrepreneurial Literacy Training for Empowerment facilitators. Involving community members in project planning and selection of facilitators and beneficiaries proved an effective way to ensure participation and ownership.

2

Building women's leadership is essential for empowerment. To ensure women's leadership at the community level, WEA recommended that the top positions on the Local Advisory Committees – chairperson and secretary – be reserved for women. WEA also recommended that each committee consist of at least 60 percent women. Initially, male community members reacted adversely to these suggestions, but thanks to consultation with communities and consistent messaging, women joined the committees and took on leadership roles, with the encouragement of male members. WEA also helped to elevate women in communities by selecting them as Entrepreneurial Literacy Training for Empowerment facilitators, and working with them and their families to ensure participation.

3

Involving men at household and community levels is essential to women's empowerment. Women's empowerment initiatives have the potential to unintentionally create an adversarial dynamic between men and women, which can have negative consequences for achieving objectives. WEA adopted an enabling environment approach to support its activities and help women beneficiaries succeed. The project has actively engaged men as beneficiaries of Entrepreneurial Literacy Training for Empowerment, as well as technical trainings which address issues like equitable household relationships and shared decision-making. WEA also recruited men as Local Advisory Committee members and Peer Leaders. These male "gender champions" promote WEA interventions and women's empowerment at the household and community levels, helping to create the change in perceptions and attitudes which enable women to translate their newfound knowledge and skills into real social and economic empowerment.

4

Linkages to inputs, markets and credit are essential to economic empowerment of women and households. Agricultural, entrepreneurial and technical trainings are the foundation of WEA's approach. However, the project and beneficiaries would have only limited success were it not for direct linkages established between beneficiaries and buyers and input dealers. WEA's partnership with ACI, as well as its close collaboration with USAID implementing partners and the Government of Bangladesh, enables the project to support beneficiaries in accessing inputs and buyers for their commodities. WEA has also worked with beneficiary groups to introduce Village Savings and Loan and to create linkages with microfinance institutions. With these supports, women can achieve their financial and savings goals, as well as access credit to invest in income generating activities.



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For additional information, go to:
<https://www.winrock.org/project/empowering-women-lifting-bangladesh>