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## 15 Years with **SHOHARDO I, II, and III** **Salma's Life-Changing Journey**

Salma (34), from Vatshala village of Austagram upazila in Kishoreganj sub-district of Bangladesh, is a well-known resourceful woman who is supporting her villagers and surrounding community with her knowledge, connections, and problem-solving skills. As an established Water Quality Tester (WQT)<sup>1</sup>, Salma is earning enough to uphold the financial solvency of her family and to educate her children.



However, this was not always the story of Salma's life. Born into a poor family, she got married in 2003 at the age of 15, a tenth grader in school. Salma passed her Secondary School Certificate (SSC) the following year, and within two years (2005) she gave birth to her first child. Salma and her family were dependent on her husband's private tuition earnings which was not enough to fulfill the needs of the family. Already in debt of BDT 350,000 (USD \$4,049.33), Salma's husband took out a loan to supplement his income, which gave them the ability to buy land and build a house; yet there were days they would go hungry in order to save money to repay the loan.

It wasn't long before Salma was pregnant with her second child in 2007, around the same time she had the chance to join SHOUHARDO I as a Community Health Volunteer (CHV) to raise awareness among the community on basic health, hygiene, and nutrition issues.

**“ The job gave me strength and hope which was very crucial for me, for my children, and for my family. I have no idea how we could have survived if I did not get the job**

With the income as a CHV, a major part of her salary was used to meet the needs of her newborn baby and make their loan payments in addition to her husband's earnings.





In her role as a CHV, Salma successfully advocated for more than 100 vulnerable people in enrolling in social safety net programs and assisted several members in getting necessary health services from hospitals and community clinics. She also enhanced the awareness among people on health-related issues such as health promotion messages, treating common ailments and illnesses, and establish protocols for maternal and newborn health. Meanwhile, Salma established good linkages with Upazila<sup>2</sup> Nirbahi Offices (UNO), a number of doctors of the Upazila Health Complex, officials from the Department of Public Health Engineering, Upazila Livestock and Upazila Agriculture Office, and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Upazila. These linkages with Government departments and local government representatives helped Salma be socially recognized and integrate her services within communities.

In 2012, with the end of SHOUHARDO I, Salma's contract as a CHV ended and with that, her income suffered. However, her networking skills, linkages, and experiences that she attained from SHOUHARDO I in her capacity as a CHV, helped her to work as a Health Worker (HW) for two Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) for almost 6 years (through 2018). At the same time, SHOUHARDO II came into operation and along with her full-time job as a HW, Salma continued leading two 30-membered women savings groups.

Salma became involved with SHOUHARDO III in October 2020 when she attended the Water Quality Tester (WQT) Local Service Provider (LSP) training, a comparatively new and quite unusual occupation for a woman in the traditionally male-dominated Bangladeshi society. Since then, Salma has been conducting arsenic testing at the community level under the SHOUHARDO III program. By providing her services as a WQT LSP, she is helping address the chronic issue of arsenic in water and helping community members access clean water.

Known as a ‘Helping Hand’ to the community, Salma’s village trusts her and the work she does. In just one year, she conducted arsenic testing of 102 tube wells, earned BDT 7,000 (USD \$81.53) while also working as a Health Volunteer (HV) following SHOUHARDO III’s capacity-building training in 2019.

Given Salma’s great work and popularity in the community, the Chairman of Union Parishad (UP)<sup>3</sup> encouraged her to take part in the local government election. In 2021, Salma contested to be a member of her local Union Parishad (UP), where she obtained the second-highest votes.



With the help of SHOUHARDO<sup>4</sup> in different phases and capacities, Salma changed her life over 15 years from 2007 to 2022. During this time frame, Salma successfully repaid her family's initial loan of BDT 350,000 (USD \$4,049.33), built a small house on her own land, and became the owner of livestock assets of approximately BDT 300,000 (USD \$3,494.33). Her livestock helps generate income and ultimately ensures appropriate nutrition for her family. In addition, she is successfully continuing the education for her daughter and three sons. Her daughter is studying in grade ten while her sons are in grade eight, seven, and one respectively. This is how the SHOUHARDO program has changed the lives and fates of many participants similar to Salma and secured progressive changes in communities.



#### Endnote

1. Water Quality Tester (WQT) is one of the Local Service Providers (LSPs) that SHOUHARDO III facilitated as part of its Service Delivery Model promotion

2. Upazila is the lowest administrative tier of field administration in Bangladesh.

3. Union Parishad is the lowest tier of Local Government in Bangladesh

4. CARE Bangladesh implemented the first phase of the USAID and Government of Bangladesh (GoB)'s \$126 million Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO) program from 2004 to 2010 and successfully reduced the prevalence of stunting and demonstrated an implementation model that could deliver services in the poorest and hardest to reach areas. The SHOUHARDO II program (2010-2015, funding of \$129), built on the proven models to provide one of the largest non-emergency food security programs in the world focusing on reaching the most socially, economically, and politically marginalized women, the rural extreme poor and communities prone to disasters and environmental change. These two phases reached over 770,000 people since 2004. SHOUHARDO III, which is a five-year \$80 million program, is achieving enduring change for 549,000 poor and extremely poor people. This phase of the program focuses on community-based asset development, building the capacity of local government and Civil Society Organizations, increased resilience to frequent shocks and stressors, and integrated behavior change interventions to bring about improved outcomes in nutrition and health for mothers and children under age two, as well as to increase women's empowerment – an approach that has been proven to reduce malnutrition and enhance household livelihoods.

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