



Akibur is taking care of their cows setting up nets for fishing

SHOUHARDO III

Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities III

“Most frustrating time of my life” - A rural fisherman struggles with the impact of COVID19

Akibur Mia (42) is a fisherman living in the village of Sunamganj district. The village is located in the northeastern part of Bangladesh, and like many other villages in the Sunamganj district, it remains inundated by water for six months during the monsoon season. Akibur has three sons and he works as daily wage labor during the dry months (November to January) and as a fisherman during the monsoon (April to September).

Akibur is a SHOUHARDO¹ III program participant since 2016 and received BDT 3,000 (\$35.5), which he used to buy a fishing net. In the past his monthly average income was BDT 8,000 (\$94.6) and Akibur and his family members were able to manage a living with his income. His wife, Farida Begum, helped to maintain the family expense by growing vegetables in their homestead, rearing chickens, ducks, and a cow. She also sold handmade ‘ghee’ (a liquid form of butter) to earn some extra money. Her contribution to the family income was about BDT 2500 (\$29.5) per month. Farida also received food rations from the program in 2018 and 2019. She joined the Village Savings and Loan Association in 2019 and

¹ Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities (SHOUHARDO) III.



Akibur is fishing in a nearby fallen pond

started to save some money. Akibur recalls, “My wife and I were doing our best to run the family. At least we could manage three meals a day easily”.

But then Akibur and his family fell into a deep crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic, as his income started to decrease. He barely managed to earn BDT 2500 (\$29.5) a month and then started to experience COVID-19 symptoms in January 2021. He did not take a test, as he feared repercussions from his neighbors.

To cope with the loss of income, he sold the cow at BDT 32,000 (\$378) and poultry at BDT 2000 (\$23.6) and he also took loans of BDT 20,000 (\$236.4) from an NGO and a local moneylender. The family quickly used these funds to cover household expenditures, treatment, and food costs. Akibur notes, “I have had no work due to the lockdown. Since I got affected by COVID-19, I failed to manage any job. This is the most frustrating time of my life.”

Currently, Akibur and his wife are still struggling to survive the pandemic. Their monthly income remains low at BDT 3000 (\$35.5) per month. To cope with the situation, Farida resumed working on her homestead garden and is trying to rebuild her livestock. As part of these efforts, Farida received a new livelihood recovery grant from the program, plus additional training on cow rearing. With the additional money, Farida is planning to buy a cow again and help her family to recover from the crisis.”



Akibur is with his family

Akibur’s story is just one example of the devastating impacts of COVID-19. The current wave of COVID-19 has proven to be the deadliest in Bangladesh since the pandemic started in March 2020. In July 2021, the country



Akibur's wife Farida's Homestead Gardening

registered nearly a double increase of COVID-19 cases compared to the beginning of the second wave in April. The current number of COVID-19 cases in the country totaled 1,104,989 with recorded deaths at 17,894.²

At present the USAID-funded SHOUHARDO III program is being implemented in eight districts in Northern Bangladesh, reaching 170,298 households. SHOUHARDO III relentlessly works to improve the lives and livelihood of program participants while improving their health, nutrition, and resilience capacities.

Recent household survey by CARE reveals the growing impact of COVID 19:

- Increasing number of household's experience loss of income or employment due to the pandemic
- Household incomes have reduced and are struggling with meeting basic demands
- Food quality and quantity is reduced
- Limited number of household are receiving social assistance
- Majority of surveyed households indicate that household well-being is decreasing

² <https://corona.gov.bd>, cited on 19 July 2021