



FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index



CASE STUDY PROFILE

Aysha, Bangladesh

Aysha is 25 years old and has lived in the same village for the past 12 years with her husband, Monir. She and Monir wed in an arranged marriage, in which she feels content, saying, "We are happy." They have two sons—one is nine years old, the other eight months. The older boy currently attends school but stays with relatives because the couple has trouble managing his education costs. The majority of children in the family's tight-knit and protective community go to school, but Aysha stopped her own education after the eighth grade when she was 14 years old and had no intention of continuing her studies.

“We are poor. We do not have monetary assets. This is why if we suggest anything, nobody follows it.”

The family grows crops on leased land and sells the surplus after meeting household needs. Aysha started working on the land seven years ago, after Monir lost his job in the garment industry in Dhaka. "My wife [made] the decision to do agricultural work," Monir says. The family also raises cows and goats, and Aysha is in charge of caring for the livestock, many of which were given as gifts for the birth of their eldest son. To add to their income, Monir produces and sells molasses with his father. Previously, the family raised hens and ducks for their eggs but stopped because of a poultry disease.



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According to Aysha, the family's tiller—a farming tool—is the household's most valuable asset. Large livestock are also important, as they can be sold to fulfill immediate or pressing needs. She says her husband owns all household assets, but he says the entire family owns them. Aysha sees her health and the health of her family members as her most important personal assets: "Everything in the world seems bad if your health is not good."

Aysha and Monir respect each other and resolve arguments through discussion. Still, Aysha emphasizes that her husband makes final decisions about activities both inside and outside the home. "In the Hadith [traditional Islamic rules or sayings]," she says, "it is stated the strength of the male is more but the women is always less." She feels that women have little power inside and no power outside of the household, but she takes her household responsibilities seriously, especially cooking, raising animals, planting the family's home garden, and weaving mats.

While Aysha does not feel empowered in her marriage, she does feel empowered working hard for her family. In time, she and Monir both hope to buy land, additional livestock, and their home. Aysha also hopes to be able to provide her sons with sound educations: "They will become great men by studying. Without receiving education, they will be illiterate."

In Aysha's community, important decisions are made by the chairman—the community leader—with the input of local elites. Aysha believes that both monetary and educational wealth are required to attain leadership and that her family has little of either. "We are poor," she says. "We do not have monetary assets. This is why if we suggest anything, nobody follows it."

The family tries to save money for larger purchases, such as livestock, land, and other livelihood expansions. In the past year, however, family income was lower than the year before because of low rice prices. Aysha would like to participate in other work but feels that her lack of education prevents it and that her days are already full. She would like to purchase a sewing machine in order to produce more income but is concerned that even if she could afford the machine, she would not have sufficient time to sew. She feels that women should focus on domestic activities and livestock care, men should work in agriculture, and children should pursue their education. "Someone who does not work is powerless...but I never think of myself as powerful," she says. "I never dare show power to my husband."

Aysha is disempowered according to the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index and has not achieved gender parity with her husband. In the Index diagram, the outer ring identifies the domains. The shaded segments inside represent the indicators in which Aysha has adequate achievements.

Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

This innovative new tool is composed of two sub-indexes: one measures how empowered women are within five domains, and the other measures gender parity in empowerment within the household. A woman is considered empowered if she has adequate achievements in four of the five domains or in some combination of the weighted indicators that reflect 80 percent total adequacy. Gender parity reflects the percentage of women who are as empowered as the men in their households.

