



FEED THE FUTURE

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

Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index



CASE STUDY PROFILE

Seema, Bangladesh

Seema is a 35-year-old mother of three. She has lived in the same village in southwest Bangladesh for 25 years and currently lives with her husband, two sons, and a daughter in a two-story, tin-roofed house with mud floors. The house has three bedrooms and a dining room, is equipped with solar energy, and has a garden outside in which she grows crops to sell. She met her husband, Sharif, on the day of their marriage, and they bought land and built a house together.

“ Sometimes I tell [my husband] where to spend, but he spends money where he thinks is necessary, so what should I say? ”

Things have improved greatly for Seema and her family over the past year, as they have expanded their income sources from paddy farming to include poultry rearing and fish pond cultivation. Seema has both domestic and agricultural responsibilities in the family, the latter including raising hens and ducks. She has been involved in the family's agricultural work since her marriage and is glad that she can participate in this activity since she was not able to complete her education. She was in school until the fifth grade but had to leave at the age of 12 in order to take care of her family after her mother died. Seema can neither read nor write and says, “I would not have stopped studying if my mother were alive.”

She feels that paddy rice and grass peas are the most valuable household assets because they provide her family's means of subsistence. Her most valuable per-



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sonal asset is the poultry farm she maintains. She hopes to expand this business, since it has the potential to bring in significant income, although it poses higher risks than her family's other agricultural pursuits. Seema feels that everyone in the family—husband, wife, and children—should own household assets jointly, but she defers to her husband on spending and saving decisions. “It is necessary to ‘cut your coat according to your cloth,’” she says. “Sometimes I tell him where to spend, but he spends money where he thinks is necessary, so what should I say?” She says that she and her husband do not disagree over time management and responsibilities, as she does not want to create trouble.

Both Sharif and Seema work hard, although she is affected by chronic illness. Regardless, she stays busy with farm and other work, since her family is dependent on her labor. She is concerned that her family will lack sufficient resources if she becomes debilitated by her illness, as they cannot count on outside support. Fortunately, Seema and her husband are self-sufficient, as shown by the land they have purchased through profits from agricultural work as well as the education they provide for their children.

The family is not involved in community leadership roles, nor does Seema aspire to become a leader or have influence on community matters. She feels

that such involvement exposes the family to conflict and wishes to avoid trouble. She also feels that she could not be involved in community leadership roles if she so desired because she is a woman—she believes that women should work hard, fast, say their prayers, and wear veils. Men, she says, should run businesses and participate in agricultural work in order to earn sufficient income for their families.

She sees empowerment as the ability to work, own assets, and send one's children to school, and she is happy when she and Sharif have enough money to feed their family and provide adequate shelter. While some in the community prefer to educate their children at home, Seema believes that her children should receive formal schooling.

Her hopes center on her children's futures: for one of her sons to pass the high school exit examination and pursue higher levels of education, and for all to marry and start their own families within the next five years. She believes that her children should focus on their education. Beyond this, she hopes that her eldest son will eventually expand the poultry farm, and she hopes to build a house for her two sons and their future families.

Seema 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 Seema 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.

