

## Duck Rearing in the face of Climatic Vulnerability: CARE Bangladesh: Chameli Begum's Story of Livelihood Adaptation

Northwest Bangladesh is characterized by chronic food insecurity and an intense vulnerability to seasonal flooding. Katihara is a remote village in the district of Gaibandha in northwest Bangladesh. The village is no stranger to serious flooding and, with the reality of climate change bearing down upon it the future is likely to bring even more extreme weather. Katihara is surrounded by fertile, low-lying paddy fields and an intricate maze of waterways filled with flowering water lilies. The landscape is strikingly flat and most of the peoples' livelihoods depend on livestock rearing and agriculture, principally growing rice, maize and potato.

For the most part, the only areas that protrude above water level are the thin, dirt pathways that snake through the village connecting adjoining crop fields. Most of the houses, built from corrugated iron and thatch, are elevated no more than a half metre above the water line. The low-lying level of infrastructure and many rivers leaves the region exceptionally vulnerable to floods and climate change, impeding agricultural productivity, shelter and settlement, as well as economic and livelihood options. For women, unequal gender power relations including social and cultural barriers further constrains their income and livelihood opportunities. To combat this susceptibility, CARE Bangladesh

utilizes a participatory community led development initiative. This initiative is the evolving operating approach of CARE that critically analyses the underlying causes of poverty and vulnerabilities and thereby facilitates community based livelihood adaptation. Duck rearing was identified as one of the adaptive livelihood options for the people living in flood prone areas, especially for women. It is in this village of Katihara that three women participated in a CARE Bangladesh duck hatching and rearing intervention initiated by the SHOUHARDO project.

One of these three women is Chameli Begum. Chameli is 46, shy with a lean, defined figure and resolute eyes. Like most Bangladeshi women who live in rural areas, she wears the traditional sari, often made of colourful and vividly designed cloth. It is October, nearing the end of the rainy season and Chameli has sold most of her ducks. There is little feed at this time of year, so the few ducks that remain forage for food in the nearby water bodies.

It was in 2007, Chameli had been identified and participated in duck rearing training as part of the SHOUHARDO community-led development initiative. The training was conducted by SKS Foundation, one of CARE Bangladesh's implementing Partner NGOs. The program taught her all the skills necessary to hatch and rear ducks. This included training on sanitation, management and marketing, as well as the right feed to provide her ducks and incubation techniques to hatch healthy ducklings. In addition, Chameli voiced that one of her greatest gains from the training was networking. Here she was introduced to both buyers and suppliers in the poultry value chain and met other women who were beginning their voyages into business and self-determination. Chameli was also introduced to several financial institutions capable of providing her capital. All of these networks were crucial in developing her business and establishing her position within the value chain.

Prior to joining the SHOUHARDO project, Chameli's family faced constant food shortages fuelling frequent tension within her family. Her husband, Soleman Ali, was often unable to provide livelihood security for the family, running a small business selling *Gur* (palm sugar) and fabric to the surrounding villages. The situation became particularly dire during Monga, an annually reoccurring cycle of poverty. During crop rotations there are inevitable periods of unemployment for large segments of the rural population who, as a result, face malnutrition and starvation. The situation is exacerbated by annual floods caused by heavy monsoonal rains and melting snow caps in the Himalayas.



*Chameli Begum*

The floods wreak devastation, ushering in death, disease, injury, population displacement and economic loss. It is this very devastation and the resulting vulnerability that inspired Chameli to participate in the SHOUHARDO training. The flooding would prevent Chameli's husband from travelling to nearby villages to sell his goods. Thereby, the punishing cycle of monsoonal floods caused her family repeated financial stress preventing business and often generating intense food insecurity. Now, however, supported by SHOUHARDO, Chameli and her family have built an elevated house equipped with enclosed duck pens and indoor incubators. As a result, her business remains mostly unaffected by the flooding.



Chameli's family previously owned a few ducks, kept solely for domestic purposes. However, they were unaware of efficient rearing practices and faced scarce and poor quality locally available feed. Moreover, Chameli's work was limited to the household, and she did not participate directly in any income generating activities. Since SHOUHARDO, duck farming is providing Chameli and her entire family with a range of benefits including the most important yet basic necessity, food security. Duck rearing has also helped to diversify the income of Chameli's family whilst egg and duck consumption also supplement the nutritional outcomes of the family members.

SHOUHARDO initially provided Chameli with 100 ducks and feed for 10 days. In addition, Chameli is a member of the Katihara Village Development Fund, a local savings group established with support from SHOUHARDO. Chameli borrowed from the local savings group to purchase an additional 150 ducks. Since 2007, Chameli has purchased thousands of eggs every year with incubators capable of storing over 9000 eggs. She sells eggs for 6 taka each while ducklings and ducks are sold for 25 and 150 taka respectively. With income derived from her business, Chameli purchased two dairy cows and 100 decimals (1 acre) of land where her family has since built a house equipped with incubators and several rearing areas for her ducks. With further assistance from the SHOUHARDO project, Chameli has taken out several subsequent loans from Karmoshangsthan Bank which she has reinvested into both her own duck business and the businesses of her family.

With a 50,000 taka (USD \$700) loan from the bank and another 50,000 in savings, Chameli purchased a *tampu* for her son, a three wheeled vehicle capable of transporting 10 to 12 people. Her son now drives the *tampu* and earns between 500-700 taka a day. The ramifications of her involvement and active participation in income generation are thus substantial. Not only has Chameli created economic stability and food security for her family, but she has generated an environment where she is empowered within both her family and the community. Chameli now makes household decisions alongside her husband and works side by side him in income generation. Prior to the program, they could not afford to send their children to school. Now, their youngest son is enrolled in a residential school at the cost of 500 taka per month. In addition, alongside many women from Katihara, Chameli has joined an Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action (EKATA) group. EKATA groups consist of women and girls who, through community and participatory methods, address women's rights violations, particularly early marriage, girl's education and violence against women. By late 2007, Chameli was part of a strong women's group, aware of the problems around them, fighting to find realistic solutions, empowered with a feeling of solidarity, and trained in enterprise development and business management. Chameli also assisted her EKATA group organize a rally, several meetings and a day's celebration of women's rights. This has been fundamental in furthering women's empowerment in the locality and developing practical skills along the way. Chameli remains an active participant in her EKATA group.

For Chameli and rural women like her, duck rearing is playing an important role in her socio-economic development. Three years ago, Chameli was dependent on her husband and like most Bangladeshi women, was rarely involved in the decision-making processes of disaster response. Now, through SHOUHARDO training, she has learnt not only about the risks and impacts of natural disasters, but has been shown how, through agricultural techniques and other practical measures, how she can increase her chances of

weathering future storms. Chameli is also an entrepreneur in her own right and with economic empowerment, she and other women experience a correlated increase in decision making in the household. Her enhanced income and decision making capacity is complemented by food security during the torrential downpours and annual flooding. Across the village, encouraged by the women's development, people have begun to raise the foundations of their homes above flood-levels. This ensures that when waters sweep through, life can continue. Ducks and possessions are saved, as are the resources needed to see out the storm. Disease can be avoided, children looked after and the women themselves are saved from much suffering. But what is perhaps most striking is the activity of Chameli's daughter who was recently married and moved to a nearby village to join her husband. Here, with the help of Chameli she has set up her own duck rearing farm and learnt the business from her mother. This alone vividly illustrates the sustainability of duck rearing and exemplifies the continuing journey for women's economic and social empowerment in northwest Bangladesh.