



Nobo Jatra Case Study Neelima Rani

“A young mother’s journey
to become an icon for
female farmers”

Neelima Rani, inspiring courage
and
inspiration in a local community



Adorned in a colorful sari, Neelima Rani, 30, has a sparkling smile and cheerful manner. A mother of two daughters, both of whom attend the local village school, in Koyra Upazila (sub-district) located in the south west coastal region of Bangladesh, Neelima is a pioneer in her local community. In large part, this is thanks to her role as a lead farmer for a climate smart demonstration plot established by the USAID funded 'Nobo Jatra – new beginning' project led by World Vision Bangladesh.

Rewind one year, and Neelima's circumstances alter drastically. A dedicated housewife and mother, working hard at chores whilst also trying to help her husband, Haridash, grow a small amount of vegetables in the land the family own. With the high levels of salinity in the water symptomatic of south west Bangladesh along with limited knowledge on how to effectively grow produce, the family faced an almost daily struggle to feed their two young daughters. Often times, Neelima reminisces, yields did not produce enough for the family to eat, let alone sell at the local market.

'My consuming worry was for my daughters; how to feed them and provide them with basic necessities. We struggled to exist for so long.'

In 2016, a glimmer of hope presented itself to Neelima's vulnerable family when she was identified as a lead farmer by her local community for a Nobo Jatra established climate smart demonstration plot. This was a remarkable and unexpected opportunity as rural Bangladeshi women often find it difficult to explore roles beyond that of conventional housewife due to entrenched social norms. Neelima's neighbors and the wider village community felt that she had the good will of the people and a deep set motivation stemming from her family's economic vulnerability to excel in this new role.

"It was like being thrown a lifeline when we had no hope left. I am forever grateful to those who felt I can do justice and help our village by becoming a lead farmer"

Neelima embraced her new role as student, earnestly participating in training provided by Nobo Jatra on sustainable production techniques including practices and inputs that are climate resilient and promote resource conservation. Climate Smart Agriculture forms the crux of Nobo Jatra's portfolio of activities under Agriculture and Livelihoods given the south west coastal region's



unsustainable levels of salinity, persistent flooding compounded with natural disasters such as Cyclone Aila and climate change effects including erratic monsoons and a rise in sea levels.

Neelima's confidence is palpable especially when speaking about all the new knowledge acquired through the training.

'We learned to use organic fertilizer instead of the chemical variety that we had been using all along. We also understood how to select and buy good quality seeds that would give us the best crops. Before we had no idea and just went with what everyone else did including our own parents and grandparents.'

It gets even better, once completing the training, Neelima effectively became the community focal point for 200 general producers within her jurisdiction. Not taking this responsibility lightly, Neelima began to passionately teach others what she herself had learned, effectively preparing the next line of farmers. As a leader of a producer group comprising 25 members, 12 of whom are female, Neelima is truly a beacon of hope and possibility to both men and women in her community.

In her new role, Neelima organizes group members for trainings, has already started to facilitate training sessions and will gradually lead sessions independently. This is a remarkable achievement given the prevalent social norms in rural Bangladesh that rarely recognize women as farmers let alone exalt them to a position as leader and role model. The producer group led by Neelima is growing seasonal vegetables for their own consumption and also

selling these products in the local market bringing in a regular source of income – truly a huge reward given the lack of sustainable income opportunities in the region.

Yet another shining light in Neelima's unique story is Haridash's unwavering support in her journey. With Haridash's help and encouragement, Neelima applied her newly acquired skills and the couple began to grow tomatoes and okra.

"I am proud of my wife. Things have changed for us economically and also within the house. Something has changed within me too – now I help my wife with chores that I never would have even six months ago. I even help collect water on the days that Neelima has her producer group meetings!"

The couple now look to the future with hopes and dreams especially for their daughters. Neelima has ambitions to establish and run a successful agro farm using all the skills and practices that she has learned as a lead farmer. For the first time ever, Neelima is planning for the future, considering how to develop a standard collection point for wholesale and retailers to ensure that the produce from her producer groups are marketed at full capacity.

With support from World Vision Bangladesh through the Nobo Jatra project, Neelima has been able to drastically alter the course of her family's path and transform into a respected and valuable community leader. Beyond her role as a lead farmer, Neelima is

often consulted by neighbors on healthcare issues. Throughout the incredible and rewarding journey, Neelima's sights have never wavered from her children and the future.

"I want to help all the women in my village and beyond to learn skills and receive training from Nobo Jatra to grow our own produce and stand on our own two feet. All women can have hope that there is a future without hunger and uncertainty. We must all pull together and do this for our children, our future generations."

About 'Nobo Jatra-new beginning'

'Nobo Jatra-New Beginning' is a five year USAID Food for Peace Title II Development Food Security Activity that seeks to improve gender equitable food security nutrition and resilience in southwest Bangladesh. World Vision Bangladesh (WVB), together with the World Food Programme (WFP) and Winrock International and 3 local partner NGOs, implement the project, integrating interventions in Maternal Child Health and Nutrition, Water Sanitation and Hygiene, agriculture and alternative livelihoods, Disaster Risk Reduction, good governance and social accountability and gender to achieve its objectives. Nobo Jatra is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) of the Government of Bangladesh in Dacope and Koyra Upazilas in Khulna and Shyamnagar and Kaliganj Upazilas in Satkhira.

