



Smallholder Agricultural Competitiveness Project (SACP)

# Success Stories



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## A Story of Resilience: Momena's Homestead Garden



In the heart of Subarnachar, Noakhali, Momena Begum, a mother of four, faced the harsh reality of losing her home due to river erosion. However, with hard work and dedication, she managed to turn her life around from uncertainty to success.

Around 4-5 years ago, Momena leased a barren acre of land through the government's agricultural khas land settlement initiative. Situated near the coastal areas of Bangladesh, the land was characterized by its high salinity, and the remote, unfarmed land was infested with wild animals. Initially, Momena, along with other women in her community, struggled to adapt to this challenging environment where farming seemed almost impossible.

Reflecting on those times, she recalls,

*“If my husband brought food, then I ate. If he brought no food, I ate nothing. But now, we don't have to worry about going hungry.”*

Momena's turning point was joining the Bhangchur Bazar Mohila Krishani Samity, an all-female farmers' group under the Smallholder Agricultural Competitiveness Project (SACP), as the lead farmer. With the support of local agriculture officers, she and her fellow farmers undertook the daunting task of clearing the land and making it suitable for farming. She actively participated in the on-demand training sessions conducted by SACP, received farming equipment from the project, and participated in watermelon and tomato demonstrations. To combat salinity, she employed the mulching method using vermicompost she produced herself after receiving training from SACP. These practices not only mitigated the salinity issue but also enhanced the fertility of her soil, resulting in higher crop yields.

Over the years, she and her husband cultivated a variety of high-yield crops including watermelon, cucumber, taro, peanut, potato, and sweet potato. A testament to her success, in one season, she invested around BDT 40,000 into watermelon production and reaped approximately BDT 1,50,000 in earnings.

Momena's life has transformed remarkably since the early days. She upgraded her modest straw and mud hut into a sturdier tin cottage and gradually acquired livestock. In fact, she has also started contributing to a life insurance scheme.

Momena Begum, once a victim of nature's fury, is now a beacon of hope and resilience for her community.

## Iqbal's Path to Prosperity Through Vermicompost Production

Iqbal Hossain Bhuiyan, a farmer and vermicompost producer hailing from Mohamaya, Chagolnaiya, Feni, weaves a tale of success through sustainable practices.

Initially a smallholder farmer, Iqbal became a lead farmer with SACP and underwent training in vermicompost production. Encouraged by the triumphs of fellow vermicompost producers associated with SACP, he embarked on his own vermicompost venture.

The fruits of his investment swiftly materialized – having invested 35,000 taka two years prior, he has since reaped earnings of 80,000 taka. However, the advantages of producing his own vermicompost were twofold – not only did it augment his income, but it also served as nourishment for his crops.

Becoming a member of the SACP producer's group, he leveraged this platform to promote his vermicompost business. Owing to the exceptional quality of his vermicompost, he supplied neighboring farmers and even the Upazila Agriculture office.



Armed with practical hands-on training and bolstered by SACP's support, Iqbal's success reverberates throughout his community. His commitment has not only propelled his financial well-being but has also empowered fellow farmers who now acquire *kecho* (earthworms) from him to initiate their own vermicomposting ventures.

With SACP's assistance and his unwavering determination, Mr. Iqbal Hossain Bhuiyan has not only cultivated thriving crops but has also sown the seeds of inspiration for forthcoming generations of farmers.





## How Rasel Triumphed Unemployment Through Agriculture



Asaduzzaman Rasel is a smallholder farmer who achieved great success through dragon fruit cultivation in a remote, coastal village in Patharghata, Barguna.

After completing his master's degree in 2015, Rasel found himself adrift without employment prospects, despite applying to countless jobs for two years. Determined not to be deterred by the job market's uncertainty, Russell decided to carve his own path and in 2017, he established his first Dragon fruit garden. He obtained saplings and took a loan of 50,000 taka from the Youth Development Office to transform a plot of land into a budding fruit garden.

The initial stages were marked by uncertainty due to his lack of technical knowledge, but Rasel's dedication and resilience remained unwavering. He reached out to the Upazila Agriculture Office for support and was incorporated into SACP, where he

received a dragon fruit demonstration as well as numerous training sessions, covering topics such as proper use of pesticides, bagging, and market preparation through their training. He also gained knowledge on appropriate fertilizers to use and their optimal timing for achieving larger fruit sizes.

Eventually, he achieved better yields and increased earnings, and was able to expand the garden to accommodate 210 pillars of dragon fruit saplings.

Rasel also leveraged the power of social media, using numerous Facebook groups to connect with agro-enthusiasts across the country and selling fruits and saplings online.

Rasel's hard work paid off. In the span of a few years, his garden flourished, and his yields grew substantially. In the first year alone, he sold Dragon fruits worth 50,000 taka and over the past four years, he has amassed earnings amounting to nearly 28 lakh taka. Inspired by his success, his neighbors have also started their own dragon fruit garden under his guidance and supervision. He also takes the initiative to transport his neighbors' produce in the nearby markets.

Rasel now aims to extend his garden to accommodate 500 pillars. He also aspires to create a training center and encourage local farmers to engage in dragon fruit cultivation, eventually developing entrepreneurs who will be able to overcome unemployment.

## A Single Mother's Path to Self Sufficiency: Ruma's Story

In 2020, Ruma Barua faced a daunting crossroads when she couldn't afford to continue her daughter's education. The passing of her husband six years ago thrust her into challenging circumstances. However, Ruma's story took a remarkable turn when she joined the SACP group in Damdoma village of Mirsorai, Chattagram. Today, Ruma stands as a shining example of success, having transformed her life as an accomplished vermicompost producer.

Ruma's journey into vermicompost production began when she learned about it from the Sub Assistant Agriculture Officer (SAAO) responsible for her village area. She received significant support from SACP, including resources such as 4 vermicompost rings, a shed, and vermin, alongside her own modest investment. Within her shed, she diligently produces 130-140 kg of compost every 40-50 days. Selling it at Tk. 12/kg, she managed to generate around Tk. 15,000 in sales over the past year.

*“Last year, I was able to pay for my daughter's tuition fee, my medicines, and other family expenses from this extra income.”*

Collecting compost every 2-3 days, Ruma assembles it for local buyers. She hopes to directly sell to customers for better pricing.

Ruma's entrepreneurial journey transcended financial benefits. The vermicompost, she observed, dramatically improved her 22-decimal cropland's fertility. This resulted in



healthier rice and pulse crops, reduced disease instances, minimized fertilizer use, and increased production.

The process of compost production also unveiled a sustainable and income generating use of cow dung. As her business flourishes, she is now envisioning the addition of two new rings this year.

Beyond the financial benefits, Ruma's business empowered her to aid others. She shared her expertise and vermin with nearby farmers, gifting approximately 4 kg of vermin to date. For Ruma, this is a source of immense pride despite her modest beginnings. She expressed, "It's amazing; being poor, I feel proud in doing these."

Ruma Borua's journey from adversity to entrepreneurship exemplifies the transformative power of determination and knowledge-sharing. Through vermicomposting, she not only secured her daughter's education but also uplifted her family and community.

## Empowering Community Farmers: Md Siraj Uddin's Path from Tea-Seller to Agro-Entrepreneur



Md Siraj Uddin is an agro-entrepreneur who spearheaded the construction of a common facilities center (CFC) in his hometown in Subarnachar, Noakhali.

Siraj came from humble beginnings, struggling to make ends meet when his father passed away, leaving behind a family of eight. He initially set up a tea store but eventually decided to venture into agriculture along with 2-3 fellow farmers. Their village was primarily focused on grain cultivation, yet Siraj and his companions defied convention and took the initiative to farm high-yielding vegetables. Utilizing innovative Sarjan method and vermicompost to counteract the high soil salinity in the region, they cultivated crops like cucumber, bitter gourd, and broad beans. Within a short span, his 50-decimal land yielded earnings of taka 4 lakh.

Siraj's commitment led him to join SACP and he took on the mantle of lead farmer in the Rahmatullah Market Farmer Group. Eager to expand his

agricultural pursuits, he consulted with the Upazila Agriculture officer to strategize how to best make use of a newly acquired small plot of land. He learned about the common facilities center – a comprehensive hub for collection, value addition, and sales, bridging the gap for local farmers with limited market access – and realized how valuable it would be for the fellow farmers in his village.

With combined financial efforts from SACP and his own investment, the CFC blossomed into a vital resource. Today, it caters to 500-600 farmers daily, spanning across three unions. A congregation point for 4-5 wholesalers, the CFC facilitates fair market value determination through discussions involving wholesalers, farmers, and Md Siraj himself. The flexibility for farmers to negotiate further enriches the ecosystem.

Each morning, the market value of produce is decided through consultation among wholesalers, farmers, and Siraj himself, allowing for negotiation. Notably, the CFC eliminates additional costs like transportation, ensuring farmers receive favorable prices.

Siraj envisions a future beyond boundaries. With aspirations to secure an export license for European countries, he exemplifies a farmer turned visionary entrepreneur. His story illustrates how determination and innovation can transform challenges into opportunities, enriching lives and communities along the way.

The Smallholder Agricultural Competitiveness Project (SACP), jointly funded by the Government of Bangladesh and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), aims to increase farmer incomes and livelihood resilience through demand-led productivity growth, diversification, and marketing in a changing climatic condition. SACP focuses on three core areas: enhancing the production of high-value crops (HVC) and driving technology adoption; promoting the processing and marketing of these crops; and strengthening climate-resilient surface water management.

The project is implemented by the agencies of the Ministry of Agriculture, namely Department of Agricultural Extension, Department of Agricultural Marketing, Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation, and Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations provides technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of the partner agencies to implement the project.

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Cover photo: Fazilatunnesa, SACP beneficiary from Subarnachar, Noakhali / FAO

