



from
Bangladesh
to the world

Stories from the floodplains

RELIVE

Rehabilitation of Livelihood and Vulnerability
Eradication for Flood Affected Population in
Bangladesh



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BACKGROUND

Sariakandi under Bogura district, in northern Bangladesh, is one of the most flood-prone upazilas (sub-districts) in the country. It also experiences devastating seasonal bouts of erosion caused by the mighty river Jamuna.

In 2020, several northern and north-eastern districts of Bangladesh experienced prolonged flooding due to torrential monsoon rain and a subsequent onrush of upstream water from Ganges-Brahmaputra River network. The flood affected over five million people across 33 districts of the country.

Bogura was one of the affected districts which bore the brunt of the devastation caused by the flood. Sariakandi upazila was hit particularly hard by the flood, impacting food and livelihood security, family shelters, water supply and sanitation (WASH) facilities, and other infrastructures. The flood came as a double blow for a community, which already reeling from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a sizable portion of the population had become 'new poor'.

Most of these people had migrated to their present location just five years ago after another devastating flood washed away their homes, which were situated on the far side of the river.

The Rehabilitation of Livelihood and Vulnerability Eradication (RELIVE) project was an initiative of BRAC, which was implemented to recover from the impacts of flood in 2020 as well as to strengthen the resilience of 1,000 most vulnerable households at Hatsherpur union of Sariakandi. The project was implemented in two phases. The first phase was implemented from January to June 2021 with funding support from Cartier Philanthropy; and the second phase was implemented from December 2021 to November 2022 with funding support from Vitol Foundation.



KEY INTERVENTIONS OF THE PROJECT

RELIVE I (January 2021 - June 2021)

1,000

households received BDT 4,500 cash grant each to ensure food security and livelihoods.

700

households received agricultural input for homestead gardening to improve nutritional needs and generate income.

40

family shelters' plinths were raised to protect from future flooding through engaging 200 people in cash-for-work services.

10

damaged tube wells were repaired and platform raised to ensure safe drinking water, even during floods.

RELIVE II* (December 2021 - November 2022)

300

households received agricultural input for homestead gardening to improve nutritional needs and generate income.

260

flood resilient latrines were installed to improve sanitation.

81

damaged tube wells were repaired and platform raised to ensure safe drinking water, even during floods.

61

family shelters' plinths were raised to protect from future flooding through engaging 300 people in cash-for-work services.

20

households received BDT 24,000 cash grants each to ensure food security and livelihood.

* To meet the unmet needs of 412 households from RELIVE I.

This booklet is a compilation of stories of struggle for survival of selected project participants during flood 2020 as well as how various support from RELIVE project helped them to recover from impacts of flood and strengthen their resilience.



Aleya Begum

Koromjapara, Hatsherpur
Sariakandi, Bogura

Aleya Begum (40) has been living in Koromjapara village of Hatsherpur Union for seven years. She is a mother of three children (two sons and one daughter). During the flood in 2015, she and her family had to migrate from the other side of the river as the severe floods and river erosion washed away everything. When waist-deep water flooded her house, she and her husband could save only the basic household materials. She also lost her cow and two goats. Since then, they have experienced two severe floods again, one in 2017 and another in 2020. During both floods, the water in her house was chest-high. In 2020, their house remained inundated for over 20 days, leaving them stranded and without food. Aleya gets upset when she remembers those days. “When there is a flood, there is no end to our suffering.”

Aleya Begum described how frustrated she was when she lost all her belongings in back-to-back floods. She thought she would never escape the floods. But the fear of flooding ended in 2022, when the flood water did not enter her house. The water remained 1.5 feet below her house plinth.

“

When there is a flood, there is no end to our suffering

”

She said she is now more confident that she will not need to shift or rebuild her house again due to floods.

With the cash assistance of BDT 4,500, she received from the RELIVE project, she bought a sheep. So far, she has sold five sheep and made four times that amount. She also rears chickens and pigeons. She has built houses in her yard for the livestock. Cultivating six types of vegetables helps to feed her family throughout the year without having to buy any from the market. She sells the surplus vegetables to her relatives and neighbours and earned BDT 4,000 so far. Aleya Begum has become self-sufficient after taking part in the project.





Champa Begum

Chokrothinath, Hatsherpur
Sariakandi, Bogura

Champa Begum (28) has been living in Chokrothinath village of Hatsherpur, Sariakandi since 2017. After losing her land to severe river erosion during the flood of 2015, she migrated with her family to the char (river flats) they currently live in. She lives with her only child, her daughter, since her husband left them and married again.

The last three years have been difficult for the mother and daughter. To make a living, Champa worked at her neighbours' houses. When severe floods hit the region, the water was waist-deep at her home, and she had no place to take shelter in Hatsherpur. She built a temporary ceiling and kept her daughter on it. Champa could not eat for days. She swam through the neighbourhood to get food for her daughter.

Tears come to her eyes as she described her sufferings. She does not want her child to go through that experience again. She does not have much in her house except for a bed and a suitcase. Despite being landless, she is trying to improve her living conditions.

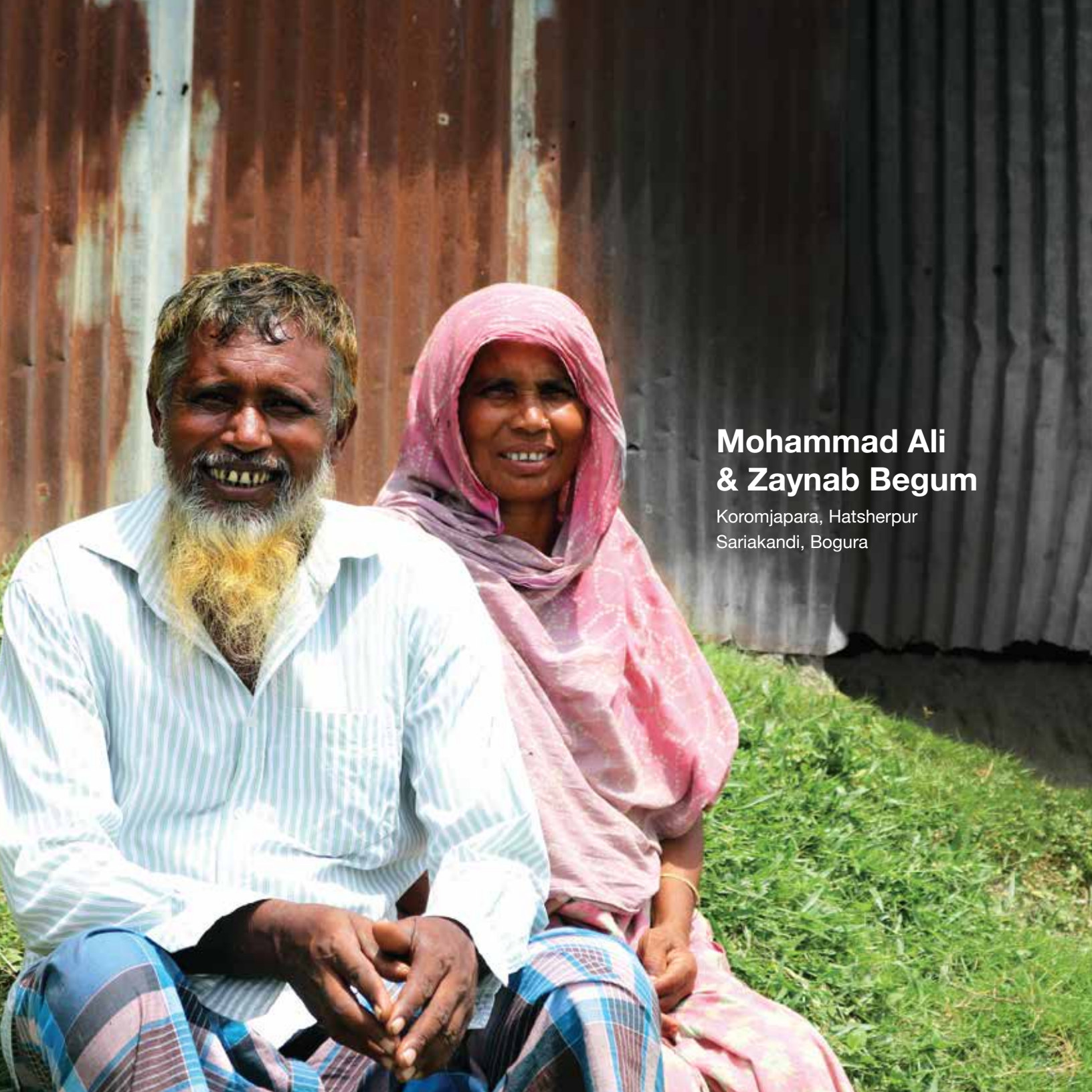
“

This cow is the only asset I have to ensure a bright future for my daughter

”

She bought a cow with the cash support of BDT 24,000 she received from BRAC under RELIVE project. Later, she brought another cow from one of her neighbours with the condition that she will rear the animal until it reaches maturity and after it gives birth, she can keep the first calf. She works in other people's crop fields and in return, gets grass for her livestock. She has no separate cowshed and keeps the cows in her living room at night. When she was asked whether she will sell the cow, Champa said, “This cow will bring good fortune to us; I can make money by selling the calves. It is the only asset I have to ensure a bright future for my daughter”. Besides rearing cows, she is also growing vegetables. So far, she has earned BDT 3,000 from selling gourds grown in her garden.





**Mohammad Ali
& Zaynab Begum**

Koromjapara, Hatsherpur
Sariakandi, Bogura

Mohammad Ali (55) and Zaynab Begum (40) are the inhabitants of Koromjapara, Hatsherpur and relies mainly on agriculture for their living. They have 3 children who are living separately from them. Mohammad Ali is the only earning member and mainly works on leased lands. He has leased a piece of land for BDT 15,000 per year where he cultivates Aman rice, wheat, jute, chilli, etc.

But harvests are often uncertain as floods destroy everything. When there are no floods, he makes a good living from the land, but when flood destroys the crops his struggles knows no bound. During the 2020 flood, the water level reached approximately 4.5 feet in his yard. They took shelter in a school building and spent many nights sleeping on wooden benches.

After the water receded, they returned to their home and found widespread devastation. Furniture, bed, stoves — everything was severely damaged. There was no place to sleep, and no food to eat. Restarting life was not easy. When his wife, Zaynab Begum, received BDT 4,500 cash support from BRAC, he decided not to waste the money and immediately bought a goat.

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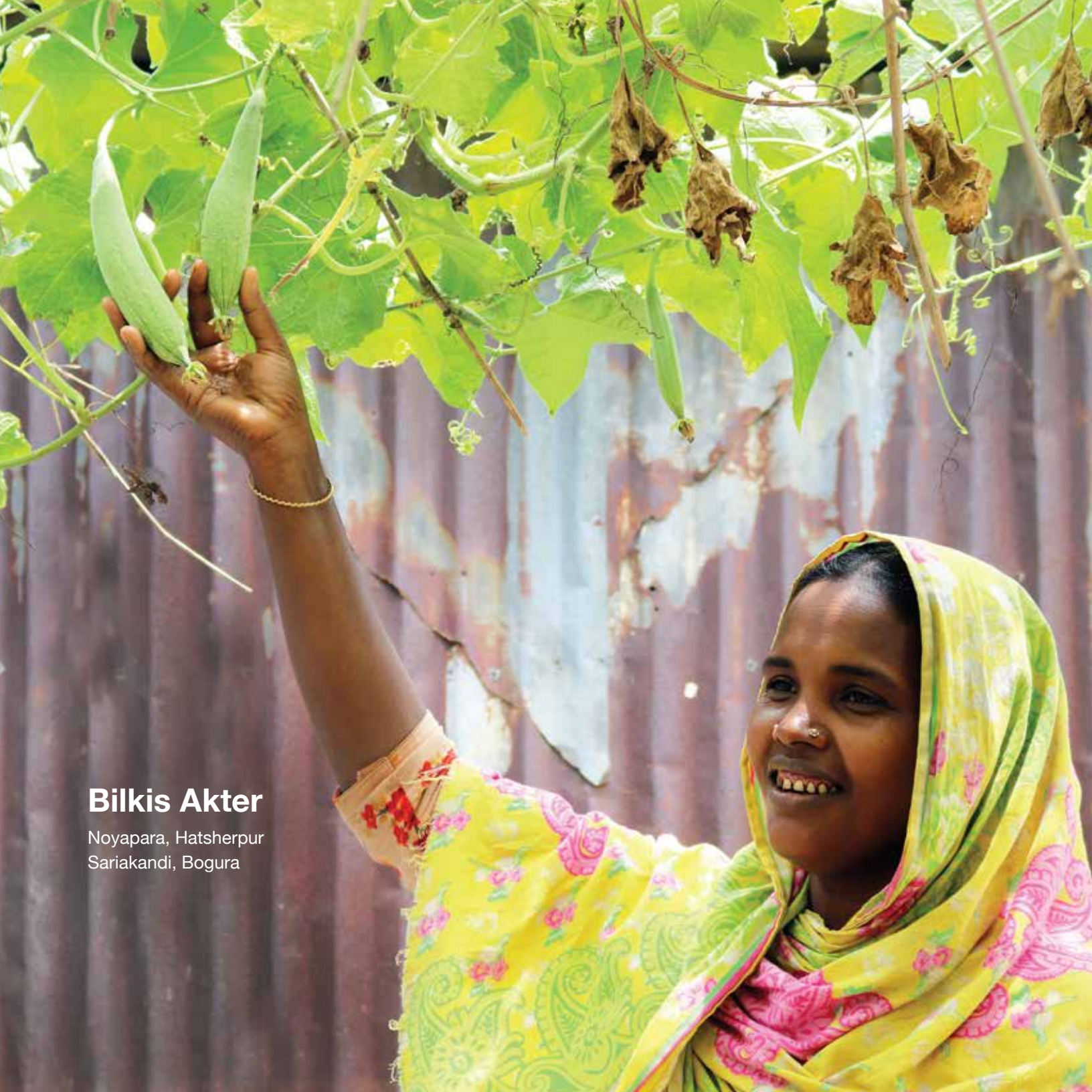
Miracles doesn't happen, we need to make them happen. We control our reality

”

Mohammad Ali worked hard to rebuild his house, grew crops, and reared the goat. Soon he had 12 goats, of which he sold seven for BDT 33,500 within 1.5 years. Two of his remaining five goats will give birth soon.

Meanwhile, Zaynab cultivated the vegetable seeds she received. She earned BDT 2,000 from selling vegetables. In the second phase of the project, their house plinth was also raised. Now they do not worry about keeping their goats or growing vegetables in the yard. During the most recent flood in 2022, the water could not reach their house plinth. Mohammad Ali said, “We turned our life around. People may think it is a miracle. Miracles don't happen, we need to make them happen. We control our reality.”





Bilkis Akter

Noyapara, Hatsherpur
Sariakandi, Bogura

Bilkis Akter has been living in Noyapara village of Hatsherpur union for long and witnessed the devastations of flood and river erosion throughout her life. She described how vulnerable she became during 2020 flood as her house was fully submerged. One of her daughters suffers from a neurological condition and requires special care. However, due to her house being fully underwater, she couldn't move her daughter away to a safe place. They took shelter on the roof of their house. The flood also severely damaged the tube well in her house.

Once the flood water subsided, she could rebuild her house, However, she still had to work hard and cross the river by boat just to get drinking water.

But now, as her tube well is repaired and its platform is also raised, Bilkis believes her struggle for water has ended. She said, "Whether we have food or not, we will always have drinking water."

“

Whether we have food or not, we will always have drinking water

”

Bilkis is one of the homestead gardeners of her community. She cultivates wax gourds, bottle gourds, sweet gourds, and leafy vegetables in her yard. She has built a bamboo cane shed to grow these plants. Bilkis said that the seeds and agricultural tools she received helped her a lot in gardening. She did not grow many vegetables earlier because good seeds were not readily available. Besides, she did not have enough money. Vegetables are expensive in the local market. But now, she grows enough to not only meet her family's needs but also supply her homegrown vegetables to relatives, neighbours, and the market. She thinks such interventions were necessary after the 2020 flood.





Rashida Begum

Hatsherpur, Sariaakandi
Bogura

“Why buy vegetables and pay others in the market when I can grow my own and earn through selling them? God gave us hands so that we can work hard for a living,” said Rashida (42) from Hatsherpur. She has experienced several small and large floods that devastated the whole community and rendered people helpless.

Rashida’s house plinth was raised under this project, and she also received a cash grant of BDT 4,500, along with vegetable seeds. When she got the money, she immediately bought a goat. She believes it was her best decision as she has now four more goats and all of them will give birth soon. She is hoping to earn a handsome amount from these goats.

“

Why buy vegetables and pay others in the market when I can grow my own and earn through selling them

”

She is also growing vegetables at home. Rashida said the vegetable seeds were of very good quality and gave a good yield of gourds and leafy vegetables. She earned around BDT 3,000 from selling vegetables from her garden. “I grew them by myself, cooked them for my family, gave them to my neighbours, and sold a good amount. I no longer need to buy vegetables from the market.”



A man with short dark hair, wearing a red, white, and blue striped polo shirt and green patterned pants, is sitting in a blue metal wheelchair. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. To his left is a large, dome-shaped structure covered in a fine blue mesh net. The background is filled with lush green tropical foliage, including banana leaves. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting it is daytime.

Abu Hannan

Nijbolail, Hatsherpur
Sariakandi, Bogura

Abu Hannan (54) has been living with a disability for 11 years where he lost the ability to stand up on his legs. He adapted to this and now walks on all fours. For long distances, he uses a wheelchair. His wife Zharna Akter (42) is a homemaker and is living with hearing and speech impairment. Hannan communicates with his wife through sign language. The couple has been living in the khaas land of Niz Bolalil village under Hatsherpur union for 20 years.

Abu Hannan runs a grocery adjacent to his home. They earn approximately BDT 2,500 per month, which is not enough for the couple.

This shop was their only income source. When Zharna got cash assistance of BDT 24,000, they bought a cow and also invested some money in buying goods to expand their grocery business. Zharna said, “At first, I got BDT 4,500 which I invested in my shop, and as a result, the business did well.

“

As the world moved forward, we thought we would be left behind. But we were wrong. God has blessed us

”

Our income went up. After that, from the cash for livelihood support, I received BDT 24,000 in two installments. I invested BDT 3,000 in the shop and bought a cow with BDT 22,000. Now, we earn BDT 250-300 daily, which is sufficient for us.”

Abu Hanif said that Zharna takes care of household chores, looks after him and also rear the cow and does gardening with great joy. She is growing vegetables in their small yard. She grew two papaya trees from the seeds she got. He said, “As the world moved forward, we thought we would be left behind. But we were wrong. God has blessed us.”



A portrait of an elderly woman, Bulbuli Begum, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a vibrant pink sari with a yellow and green border, and a matching pink headscarf. Her face shows signs of age, and she has a small nose ring. The background is a dense thicket of green foliage and brown branches.

Bulbuli Begum

Hatsherpur
Sariakandi, Bogura

Bulbuli Begum (58) has seen four generations of her family struggle for food and livelihood as devastating floods hit almost every year. She had to repair and rebuild her house several times. She said, “We could hardly earn enough money for food, but we had to struggle with building shelters right after the flood which was unbearably stressful”. Since she started living at her current house, challenges have remained as floodwaters enter her house. She has lost her chickens to the flood as well.

But now, as her house plinth has been raised, she is much happier. Not only that, she also bought sheep with the cash assistance she received.

“

One can hardly imagine making so much within such a short time. Thank God

”

The sheep has given birth to six more. This year, she performed the qurbani (sacrificing a sheep on Eid-UI-Adha). She has never imagined that she could do this after the devastation of 2020. She said, “One can hardly imagine making so much within such a short time. Thank God.”





Sufiya Begum

Chokrothinath, Hatsherpur
Sariakandi, Bogura

Sufiya Begum (31) lives in the char (river flats) area of the river Jamuna. Five years ago, the Jamuna swallowed her house and she, along with her family, shifted to Chokrothinath village of Hatsherpur union. Even in this area, her house got flooded by approximately three feet of water during 2020 flood. Usually, her husband earns BDT 300 to 400, and she earns BDT 150 per day as day labourers. But in the rainy season, no work is available in the area. On average, they earn BDT 4,000 to 4,500 each month, which is insufficient for the family.

Her homestead plinth has been raised by four feet from the ground to prevent flooding. She said that if there is a flood like 2020, her house will not be inundated.

“

I am living a better life than before with the support I got from BRAC. I will work hard to increase my assets and income to survive in the Char area

”

Her husband participated in cash-for-work activities and worked 10 days for BDT 300 per day while raising the plinths of other houses. Sufiya added BDT 1,200 to it and bought a goat. Now, she has three goats. She said, “I will work hard to increase my assets and income to survive in the char area.” Sufiya seemed very happy in her vegetable garden. Her leafy vegetables were healthy and the yield of gourds was also high.





Renu Begum

Hatsherpur, Sariaakandi
Bogura

Renu Begum (55) lives in Chokrothinath village, Hatsherpur union. Her husband is a farmer and her family has five members. Whatever her husband and son earn is mostly seasonal, and if the harvest is not good, they have to struggle the whole year. With the cash grant from BRAC, Renu bought her daughter-in-law a sewing machine.

She said, “My daughter-in-law is a skilled tailor, so why not let her flourish? I bought her the machine, and now she earns around 3,500 BDT monthly. She can help out the family and also can meet her own needs.” She is also growing vegetables behind her house.

She got her tube well repaired with a raised platform. In 2020, the flood damaged her tube well and she had to travel long distances by boat to collect water.

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After flood waters receded, the platform got damaged. It was very risky to collect water. Now it has become very convenient for all of us

”

She said, “It was very risky to collect water. Now it has become very convenient for all of us and I am not embarrassed anymore when I have guests, especially my children’s in-laws. I can take them to the tube well to drink or take a bath.”



A woman, Tahmina Begum, is shown in profile, reaching up with her right hand to touch a green, leafy vegetable growing on a vine. She is wearing a patterned sari with a red border and a red shawl. The background features a large orange tarp and a building with a corrugated metal roof under a clear blue sky.

Tahmina Begum

Chokrothinath, Hatsherpur
Sariakandi, Bogura

Tahmina Begum (60) lives in Chokrothinath village with her husband who is an elderly person and doesn't earn. Her sons work outside the village and can hardly send any money back home, leaving her as the only breadwinner.

She has no land of her own but a small house. During floods, this house was inundated with knee-deep water. They had no place to take shelter, so the couple remained in the house. The biggest challenge was sanitation. As she and her husband are old, it was very challenging to travel to distant places on banana rafts to use the toilet.

Now she has a newly built flood-resilient latrine. She has grown grass on the latrine platform so that the soil does not erode due to rain or flood water.

“

For aged persons like us, sanitation challenge was the greatest among all during and right after the flood

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PROJECT LOCATION



 District Boundary

 Sariakandi Upazila

 Upazila Boundary

 Project Location

BRAC

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