

## Case Study

### **Case story: Seeds of Change: Rogina's Fight Against Poverty and Malnutrition**

In the remote coastal village in Bagerhat district, southwest Bangladesh, Rogina Begum's life was once a relentless cycle of hardship and uncertainty. At 32 years old, Rogina, a mother of three young children, her eldest son aged 7, a daughter of 5, and her youngest boy just 1-faced the daily struggles typical of many underprivileged families in this poverty-stricken region. Born into a family of day laborers, Rogina married young and moved to her husband's modest mudbrick home, where they eked out a living from seasonal fishing and sporadic farm work. The coastal area's vulnerability to salinity intrusion and frequent cyclones compounded their woes, making reliable food sources scarce and nutritious meals a luxury they could rarely afford.

Rogina's struggles were deeply intertwined with the health challenges plaguing her family. Her pregnancies had been fraught with complications; during her second and third, she suffered from severe anemia and hypertension, with no access to regular antenatal check-ups due to the nearest health center being over 10 kilometers away on poorly maintained roads. Postnatal care was nonexistent, leaving her weakened and unable to breastfeed effectively. Her children bore the brunt of this neglect: her eldest son was under weight and often ill with preventable infections like diarrhea and respiratory issues, while her daughter showed early signs of stunting-short for her age and developmentally delayed. The youngest, born prematurely, struggled with frequent fevers and poor growth, exacerbated by a diet limited to rice and occasional fish, lacking the vitamins and proteins needed for healthy development. Malnutrition was rampant in their community, with nearly 40% of under-5 children affected, mirroring the regional statistics. Rogina's husband, working long hours in the fields, could barely provide enough income to cover basic needs, let alone medical expenses. "I felt helpless," Rogina recalls. "Watching my children suffer from hunger and sickness broke my heart every day. We lost a neighbor's child to measles last year because no one knew about vaccinations. I feared the same for mine."

The turning point came in early 2024 when Rogina was introduced to the mother and Child Care Program under Vision Bangladesh Health and Education Society (VBHES)'s Strategic Objective 3 (SO3). This initiative, aimed at enhancing health services for the underprivileged in rural and coastal areas, reached out to her village through community health workers who conducted door-to-door assessments. Recognizing Rogina's family as high-risk due to malnutrition and limited healthcare access, they enrolled her in a series of tailored interventions. Rogina began with nutrition counseling sessions, where she joined approximately 3,000 other mothers and

caregivers trained in hygienic food preparation, Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices, and dietary diversity. These sessions, held in small groups at the local community center, taught her the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and introducing complementary foods rich in nutrients for older infants. "I learned that simple things like adding spinach or eggs could make a big difference," she says. The program addressed cultural misconceptions, such as the belief that certain foods were "too expensive" or unsuitable for children, by emphasizing locally available options.

Building on this, Rogina's household was one of around 223 supported in establishing homestead gardening and small-scale livestock rearing. VBHES provided her with seeds for nutrient-dense vegetables like spinach, okra, and sweet potatoes, along with tools and training on sustainable farming techniques resilient to coastal salinity. She also received a few chickens and goats, learning how to rear them for eggs, milk, and meat—key protein sources to combat dietary deficiencies. This not only improved her family's meals but generated supplementary income; within months, Rogina was selling surplus eggs at the local market, boosting their household earnings by about 30%. "Before, we ate the same bland rice every day. Now, my garden gives us fresh greens, and the animals provide nutritional for the children. It's like our home became a source of life," she explains.

The program's immunization drives ensured her children were vaccinated against diseases like measles, polio, and diphtheria, with mobile camps reaching even isolated villages like hers. Around 90% of under-5 children in the area, including Rogina's, achieved full coverage, drastically reducing illness-related risks. For her ongoing needs, Rogina received comprehensive antenatal and postnatal care during a subsequent health scare though not pregnant at the time, the check-ups revealed lingering anemia, which was managed with iron and folic acid supplements. She also attended safe delivery counseling, learning about skilled birth attendance and emergency signs, knowledge she wished she had during her previous pregnancies. Additionally, good parenting counseling sessions, attended by around 2,500 families like hers, covered hygiene practices, emotional nurturing, and early stimulation techniques. Rogina implemented these by creating play routines with homemade toys and emphasizing handwashing, fostering her children's cognitive and social development.

The interventions profoundly transformed Rogina's life and her family's well-being. Her children's health improved dramatically: stunting in her daughter was reversed, with a 25% reduction in prevalence mirroring the program's area-wide impact, and all three now thrive with better growth metrics and fewer illnesses. Dietary diversity increased by about 35%, leading to stronger immune systems and more energy for play and learning. Rogina herself gained confidence and physical strength, no longer plagued by fatigue. Maternal complications, once a constant fear, were mitigated through proactive care, contributing to a roughly 20% drop in such issues community-

wide. Economically, the homestead initiatives provided stability, allowing her husband to focus on steady work while Rogina managed home-based income. "My family is healthier and happier. My son now dreams of going to school without missing days due to sickness. We've broken the cycle of despair," Rogina shares proudly.

Beyond her household, Rogina's story has rippled into the community, embodying the program's empowerment goals. As one of approximately 80% of mothers reporting increased confidence in health management, she has become an informal leader, sharing her knowledge with neighbors. She volunteers at counseling sessions, helping train others in gardening and nutrition, and has encouraged 15 families in her village to adopt similar practices. This has fostered a culture of proactive healthcare-seeking, reducing under-5 mortality by an estimated 15% in the area. Rogina's advocacy even led to a community garden initiative, where families collaborate on larger plots, enhancing food security amid climate challenges. Her contributions align with VBHES's sustainability focus, training local health workers and promoting income-generating activities that have empowered around 5,000 households.

Rogina Begum's journey from struggle to strength illustrates the transformative power of VBHES's Mother and Child Care Program. In a region where poverty and isolation once dictated fates, her story is a testament to how targeted interventions can restore health, dignity, and hope—not just for one family, but for an entire community. As Rogina looks to the future, she says, "I was once afraid for my children's tomorrow. Now, I know they and our village have a brighter path ahead."