

Women's Empowerment

From Single Mom to Animal Doctor: The Long March out of Poverty



Over 30 years ago, Bibi Shonabhan was abandoned by her husband and left to raise a young son and daughter on her own. Unsure what to do, she moved in with her parents, who helped the young mother care for her family. However, two years later, her parents both died and Bibi was again on her own.

Desperate to find work, Ms. Bibi discovered a private sector agricultural organization that provided training in poultry vaccination—a practice that helped small-scale farmers raise healthier chickens and improve the quality of their eggs. This gave her a way to earn money and provide food and shelter for her children as a single mother.

“We can get Dakterni on call 24-7 for our sick animals and she will not let them die,” said Ms. Happee Akhter, a poultry farmer and happy customer in Dr. Bibi’s village of Langurpur.

Years later, the 60-plus-year-old Bibi had built a trustworthy reputation in her community of Langurpur—located in northeastern Bangladesh—and earned the respected designation from her customers as “*Dakterni*” (meaning “woman doctor”). But this doctor was different; she was there to ensure the health and well-being of her fellow villagers’ farm animals and help them raise poultry and livestock more efficiently. One family was so grateful for Bibi’s work that they even provided her and her family a room to live in, free of rent.



In 2014, the experienced Dr. Bibi was selected by USAID’s Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) Project to enroll in specialized training sessions to improve her technical and business management skills. Upon completion, she established a small livestock pharmacy providing vaccinations and selling medicines for poultry and livestock.

As a woman, her role as a provider of livestock health services has enabled other women in her community—many of whom

are typically reluctant to seek such services from men—to engage with Dr. Bibi instead.

Today Bibi is working in three additional *upazilas* (counties), where she is treating poultry and livestock, and has established several strong professional relationships with veterinarians. Through these contacts, she has established a referral service that links poor farmers to veterinary professionals, helping secure priority treatment for underserved farmers. Moreover, her regular interactions with veterinarians have helped Dr. Bibi increase her own medical knowledge.

Expanding the range of her services into additional localities has also increased the amount of money she makes, dramatically improving the quality of her life, while serving those who—like Dr. Bibi herself—are trying to lift themselves into a brighter and more prosperous future.

