

# Making Markets Work For Women



*Building the capacity and resilience of marginalized women to overcome poverty and feed their families*

*Women make up half the world's population yet represent 70 percent of the world's poor. Educating and empowering women—who on average spend 90 percent of their earned income on their families—strengthens economies, increases productivity, and has a direct and lasting impact on family well-being. Promoting gender equality in agriculture could reduce hunger for 100 million people.*

## TRANSFORMING WOMEN FROM SUBSISTENCE FARMERS TO ENTREPRENEURS



Since 2009, **Helen Keller International** (HKI) has tested innovative approaches to help women living in extreme poverty in Bangladesh's remote Chittagong Hill Tracts increase agricultural production and sell their produce at competitive prices. **Making Markets Work for Women** (M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup>) builds on HKI's tested Enhanced Homestead Food Production program, which provides women with technical training and inputs to establish year-round gardens with micronutrient-rich fruits and vegetables as well as poultry and small livestock. Through intensive education and training, **M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> raises the capacity of low-income women to lift their families out of poverty, overcome gender barriers, and improve their family's health.**

## ENHANCING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION & PROFITS

M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> provides women with fruit saplings and vegetable seeds, as well as tools and agricultural training, so that they can grow a surplus of fresh produce to sell for income. Women are encouraged to grow nutrient-rich vegetables—like spinach and carrots—as well as higher-value produce—like pineapple and maize—to maximize their profits. Women are trained on sustainable farming methods, such as integrated pest management and organic fertilizer. They learn to add value to foods through food processing techniques like drying, canning and hygienic packaging, and to preserve spices like ginger and turmeric until after the harvest season when the sale price is at its highest.

## IMPROVING BUSINESS & MARKETING SKILLS

M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> trains women in market research, pricing, and bookkeeping. Market surveys help to reveal what is in demand that season and from whom. Women are trained how to negotiate to gain a dedicated space at the market. They learn how to sort and display their produce to demand the highest price and then sell them in the local market or directly to small hotels and restaurants. M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> encourages women to save money and reinvest their income into more seeds and tools.



## FOSTERING NETWORKING & MARKET ACCESS

Women strengthen their bargaining power by forming marketing groups and aggregating produce to attract larger buyers who pay premium prices. Linkage events connect farmers with vendors to build networks and gain better access to high-quality inputs like seeds. M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> also links women to village leaders to increase access to cultivable land.

## OVERCOMING GENDER INEQUALITY

Like many developing countries, the social mobility of women in Bangladesh is often limited by cultural norms. Women farmers of the indigenous tribes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts are among the most disenfranchised in the country. An ethnic and religious minority, they do not own land and have limited access to ethnic majority-controlled markets, agricultural training and health services.

M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> brings men and women together to discuss a more equitable division of labor and household decision making. We use nutrition and food production as an entry point to increase negotiation and communication skills among family members while raising awareness of the health and economic consequences of gender inequality. Through our nutrition and gender training, men are educated on household work-sharing and encouraged to offer more autonomy to women. Women are empowered to influence decision-making at the household and community levels.



## *Hunger and Poverty in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts*

- The Chittagong Hill Tracts are a mountainous region in southeastern Bangladesh and home to some of the country's highest rates of extreme poverty and malnutrition.
- The region's women have limited rights to the land and tools they need to cultivate gardens and farms to feed their families.
- Families are forced to subsist on the food they grow using inefficient, unsustainable farming methods, while relying on irregular day labor for income.
- Families are susceptible to the detrimental impact of frequent flooding in the region, lost work days due to illness, and shifting market prices that make daily survival a struggle.
- Gender barriers restrict women from making household decisions, including how much and what kinds of food to feed their children.
- In Bangladesh, 40,000 children are blind, often because they don't get enough vitamin A in their diet.

## PROMOTING FAMILY HEALTH

Families receive nutrition counseling—individually and in group courtyard sessions—and are linked to local health services. Like all of HKI's nutrition programs, M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> provides nutrition education for men and women with a focus on improving child nutrition in the crucial 1,000 day window from pregnancy to two years of age. Mothers also learn to prepare more nutritious meals through cooking demonstrations using the vegetables and eggs that they produce.



## CATALYZING SOCIAL CHANGE

In addition to reducing poverty and improving health, M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> seeks to catalyze broad community development and social inclusion of historically marginalized tribes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. As women strengthen their leadership capacity in their marketing groups and as they become more confident, women are able to address other community problems. By participating more fully in mainstream markets and health services, M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> helps women and their families claim their rights to public and private services and challenge negative stereotypes about their communities.



### *Stories of Change: Dhanalata Chakma*

*Dhanalata is a mother of three young girls in the central Chittagong Hill Tracts. She and her husband were barely surviving on day labor wages, and at times could not feed their children or buy them clothes for school. "Before I joined the M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup>," she said, "my family was living in darkness and total despair." At times, Dhanalata even contemplated suicide.*

*In 2010, Dhanalata joined M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> and received 30 kgs (66 lbs) of seeds. At the advice of her field officers, she built a vegetable and pumpkin garden next to her house. After feeding her family, she had enough surplus to sell at the market. Her profits enabled her to secure a mortgage on 40% of the land for the next 3 years. She bought enough tin for a roof, food for three months, and more seed. The next season, Dhanalata grew enough food to feed her family for six months. M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> provided her more seed which she and her husband decided to plant in another field. "The neighbors all look at our gardens when they pass by the road," said Dhanalata, "they are amazed and are interested in making their own gardens."*

*Dhanalata no longer works as a day laborer, instead focusing her time on cultivating and selling her vegetables. In her second year in the program, she received 600 taka (US\$8) from M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> to buy chickens and used her profits from her vegetable sales to buy another chicken with chicks. "Now if I sell these chicks, I will get 6000-7000 taka (US\$78-90)," she said, "I have admitted my children to school and can afford to buy clothes for them. I feel very fortunate and mentally at peace with the change in our present."*



## REDUCING POVERTY AND IMPROVING HEALTH

The M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> program has made a significant impact on the lives of women and their families in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Three years after the program began:

- 98% of participants saw an increase in monthly income greater than 30%;
- 96% of families ate a diverse, nutritious diet;
- Participating families were less dependent on day labor and other inconsistent income sources;
- 90% of participating mothers reported more involvement in making household and economic decisions for their families.

## Stories of Change: Lipi Chakma

*Lipi is the mother of two girls. Her oldest went to primary school and Lipi and her husband barely supported their family as day laborers. With limited skills, Lipi had no alternative for earning a living outside of the village. She could read and write, but did not have any formal education, and did not own land except around her home.*



*After joining the M<sup>2</sup>W<sup>2</sup> program, Lipi received vegetable seeds, tools and money to buy chickens. She received intensive training in poultry rearing and vegetable cultivation. She began to grow cucumbers, snake gourd, and yard long beans, and built a poultry shed that is now home to three hens and 24 chicks. For the first time, Lipi will earn a regular income.*

*"I dream of paying all the educational expenses for my two daughters," Lipi says. "With this income I also will build a proper latrine and install a well for safe drinking water." Lipi is already working towards her dreams and plans to rent additional land to cultivate more vegetables.*

## HELEN KELLER INTERNATIONAL: SAVING SIGHT AND LIVES

Helen Keller International (HKI) is privileged to carry on the work and legacy of our founding trustee, Helen Keller, whose indomitable spirit continues to guide our work worldwide. Founded in 1915, HKI is one of the world's leading nonprofit organizations working to prevent blindness and reduce malnutrition.

Headquartered in New York City, HKI's programs operate in 22 countries—13 in Africa, 8 in Asia Pacific, and in the United States—reaching nearly 200 million people each year. We base our programs on scientific evidence, and use ongoing monitoring and evaluation to improve the delivery of our proven solutions to those families most in need.

*Our mission is to save the sight and lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.*

Working in Bangladesh since 1978, HKI has successfully designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated more than 40 community-based health and nutrition projects throughout the country. HKI has provided technical assistance for diverse programs in nutrition and eye health, including homestead food production, nutrition education, and community-based rehabilitation of the blind. We build the capacity of government and local organizations, and we forge links between the public, private and nonprofit sectors to build sustainability to ensure that projects can continue to operate beyond HKI's involvement. HKI was one of the first international nongovernmental organizations to work in the remote Chittagong Hill Tracts after the 1997 Peace Accord and continues to be one of a few NGOs with an active presence and strong community ties in this remote region of the country.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about Making Markets Work for Women or Helen Keller International, please visit our website [www.hki.org](http://www.hki.org) or contact:

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