**INTRODUCTION**

Anita Vadro was born in 1976 in Sakarikati union in Nazirpur upazila. Her family consisted of eight members (her father, mother, three brothers and two sisters). Her father had 60 decimals of land (20 decimals homestead land and 40 decimal productive land), and their family was working extreme poor. Anita did not attend school and her marriage was arranged early as her family could not cope with the high number of dependents in the household.
She is now 36 years old, and married with two children. As her husband is sick, she is the main income earner of the family, and she struggles to earn a sufficient income to provide enough food for her family. Her lack of formal education and skills means that she has to rely on the income she can make from working as a housemaid. Although she does know how to weave baskets from bamboo, she is unable to make enough profit from this to generate a significant income. Therefore, like her father before her, she is working extreme poor and her story might reflect the inter-generational dimension of extreme poverty.

**HOUSEHOLD’S WELL-BEING BEFORE THE SHIREE INTERVENTION**

Before the household became involved with the shiree programme, their well-being was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Just before the intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well-being category</td>
<td>Working extreme poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diets</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 meal a day in the lean period and 1-2 meals a day for rest of the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cheap and local vegetables consumed every day with dal and potato once a week,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fish once a week if they could catch it, but they do not buy from the market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Egg once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meat very occasionally – maybe only once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Livelihoods now - in terms of contribution to that years’ income</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For other principal adult member</td>
<td>1. Producing fish-catching materials from bamboo (seasonally, May-August)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband:</td>
<td>1. Day labourer (Earth cutting, Agri labourer) - 10/12 days work in a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Productive assets now rank them in terms of value (e.g. land, livestock, rickshaws)</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
House and homestead: ownership, condition of tenure, condition of house.

Owned two decimals of homestead land. House made from Bamboo, wood, mud and local material (Goal pata).

LIFE HISTORY NARRATIVE

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH (1976-1991)

Anita Vadro (36) is the youngest daughter in her family and has five siblings: Parul (now 52), Shukhranjon (50), Hori (45), Kajol (42) and Basudeb (34). Despite her father working hard to earn an income, none of the children in this household received any form of formal education because the household’s income was never sufficient to cover the school costs. The father, the main income earner, struggled to feed his five children, and Anita reported that they were only able to have one or two daily meals. Her father had two main occupations; he used to work as a day labourer and as a domestic servant. Her mother worked within their home and took care of the five children.

Because of their considerable lack of income, Anita’s parents arranged her elder sister’s marriage at a very young age, when she was only ten or 12 years old, so that they were not required to pay a dowry that they could not have afforded.

Her elder brother, Sukhranjon, started catching fish and working as day labourer when he was ten years old. This allowed him to contribute to household’s income so the entire family were not solely dependent on their father’s income. Although he started suffering from mental fear (paranoia) for five to six years, he was still able to contribute to the household’s income.

Anita’s family tried their best to keep her brother alive and spent ten thousand taka on medical treatment which they mobilized by selling their 20 decimal of productive land. Unfortunately he suddenly died in 1980 when he was only 20 years old, leaving the household more vulnerable economically (without a valuable productive asset and without an important income earner) and emotionally with the pain of losing their son. After his death her parents were close to madness and were unable to continue working. The financial dependency ratio started increasing with one income earner and 4 dependents, so the household’s income reduced and became more vulnerable according to her dad’s health and labour.
Death of main income earner

After the death of her eldest brother, her next brother (15 years old at the time) started to earn an income by catching fish. This was their family’s heritage business and because at that time he was the earning more money than his father, the household members relied on the money he earned. However, the income was not sufficient to feed the household members and they were not able to afford adequate nutrition and quantity of food or to meet other household expenses. Anita and her other sibling were too young to earn at that stage. As a consequence of the increase of the dependency ratio after the loss of her brother and the reduction in overall income, the household fell into destitution and were only able to have one or two meals per day, which dropped to one during the lean season (July to October).


In 1992 when she was 16, Anita’s parents decided to marry her off because they could not afford so many dependents. To pay for the wedding costs of her marriage 4.5 decimals of her father’s land had been mortgaged. The total cost of her marriage was approximately 4,000 taka for the marriage ceremony but fortunately this marriage was arranged without dowry. This arrangement was made with the help of neighbours and the local elite because the prospective groom liked Anita. The wedding took place in an adjacent village in Shakarikati union of Nazirpur upazila.

A husband who does not work

Her husband, Manik, at the time of marriage did not like work and was not used to it. She moved to his family’s home after the wedding which increased the number of household members to 11 (Manik, Anita, Manik’s father, mother, sister, brother, his brother’s wife and their four kids). Anita’s brother-in-law and father-in-law were the sole income earners in the household. They ran a puffed rice business. Although Manik did some seasonal casual labour, he did not do much work and his family was therefore working extreme poor due to the high financial dependency ratio within the household.

Separation: centripetal crack

In 1997, as a result of the economic crisis and internal family conflicts, Manik’s brother and other family members asked him and Anita to separate. The main reason was that Manik was not working to contribute to the household’s income. Anita and her husband separated from the in laws family and built a small separate house on her in-laws’ land.
Birth of first child

After they separated from her in-laws family, Anita’s husband was forced to find work as a day labourer. However he regularly suffered from headaches and so did not do this work regularly. In 1998, she gave birth to a boy who she named Milton Boral. This increase the household’s consumption needs and expenditures whilst their income remained at about 1,000-1,100 taka per month. This made it difficult for them to provide enough and nutritious food for their three household members.

Husband forced to work as fisherman and day labourer

To increase their income, Anita’s husband concentrated on earning a living by catching fish from the river (mostly for home consumption) and working more as a casual day labouring. With both jobs he made an irregular monthly income of between 1,000 to 1,200 taka. In the lean period (especially the rainy season between May and August) because his income decreased, they used to have only one meal per day. This made the family food insecure but they reported that psychologically they led a better life compared to when they lived with Anita’s in-laws.

To boost the household’s income, Anita did some housemaid work in exchange for meals and some rice at the end of the week. She also occasionally made baskets for sale which were designed to catch fish, by weaving bamboo. The demand for this product was high in the rainy season (May, June and July) but even then, she still only earned a small amount of money from this (approximately 4,000 taka in three month whilst bamboo materials cost 5,000 taka per bunch). Because producing those products became too expensive, her production was limited. Anita gave birth to her second son in 2003.

MIDDLE ADULTHOOD (2004-2012)

Husband’s health shocks and women’s extra work

In 2010, her husband started getting severe headaches which affected his behaviour and his ability to earn an income. Anita said he started to regularly behave abnormally and was unable to work all the time because he suffered from severe headaches.

As her husband was unable to work, Anita’s housemaid earnings of just a meal and some rice was the only source of income they had to provide for the three members of the household. Anita therefore tried to increase her working hours by working in more houses. Her husband had to receive medical treatment for two years in the Upazila’s health centre (Nazirpur) to
cure his brain headaches, which cost a total of 20,000 taka. The family raised this money by getting financial help from Manik’s sister which they would not have to pay back.

**Help from relatives and son’s education**

Anita and Manik currently have their children enrolled in school. Her elder son studies in class eight and her younger son in class three. However, due to the family’s financial situation, Anita is not capable of continuing the children’s education without the help of relatives and neighbours. They provided Anita with books, note books, pens, school fees etc so that she can continue to send her children to school.

**CONCLUSION**

Anita’s childhood and married life were critically relying on the labour of one main male income earner who often happened to face severe health shocks. Because of her low and unstable income her well-being remained poor and her food habits insufficient. She is today more vulnerable than she was in her childhood, because now, she is the main income-earner on which three household members depend. Over time her well-being has continually moved between the destitute and the working poor categories.

Anita struggled in extreme poverty all her life, as she was born into a large family with only one main income earner. With the death of her older brother at 20 years old after inconclusive but expensive medical treatments, her household’s well-being and vulnerability increased tremendously. The household’s income essentially relied on the second son, whose income was insufficient to cover the basic needs of all the dependent household members. In order to reduce the financial dependency ratio, Anita’s parents got her married at the age of 16 to Manik, a man from a large working extreme poor family with no dowry requirement.

Shortly after her marriage, her husband’s family asked them to get their independence because Manik failed to contribute to the household’s income and was seen as lazy. Once independent from his parents, Manik eventually became involved with some income earning activities in order to feed himself and his wife. However, due to his poor health, this endeavour was not successful. He began to suffer from extreme headaches which stopped him from earning a regular and sufficient income for Anita and her new born son. Anita therefore, started to work as a housemaid whilst Manik’s health deteriorated. She tried to earn more money by working in more houses and also making fish catching materials from bamboo. However she is also not capable to earn regularly due to a lack of money to buy bamboo/raw materials. Her husband’s treatment costs are also another burden for the
family, but fortunately they are able to rely on support from Manik’s family to meet these costs.

Although Anita’s life is a constant struggle, she has managed to keep her two sons in education. For this she also relies extensively on support networks, as her relatives and neighbours provide money for fees and school materials. As Anita herself did not get an education, perhaps her insistence that her children go to school is a reflection of her desire for them to have a better life.

**LIFE HISTORY MAP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Well-being movement</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Moved down 2 to 1</td>
<td>Anita’s elder brother died the age of 20, and her family became vulnerable as he was the main income earner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Moved slightly up 1 to 2</td>
<td>Anita got married into a working extreme poor family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Moved slightly down from 2 to 1</td>
<td>Anita and her husband separated from the in-laws family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Remained at 1</td>
<td>First child born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-2010</td>
<td>Moved up to low 2</td>
<td>Husband got job as fisherman and day labourer and Anita did some work as a housemaid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>Moved down 2 to 1</td>
<td>Husband began suffering frequent headaches, stopped being able to work as frequently and required treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Moved slightly up 1 to 2</td>
<td>Husband’s chronic headaches stopped and he was able to work more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Life history map of Anita Vadro (35)

- Anita's father was the only income earner in her households.
- Elder brother becomes the main income earner- 1 income earner and 4 dependents.
- The family sells productive land to pay for the brother's medical treatment.
- After 5 years of poor health, Anita's elder brother died.
- Decrease of household's income and labouring capacity.
- Anita got married into another large working extreme poor family.
- Well-being of 9 dependents relying on 2 income earners.
- Husband starts working as a day labourer.
- Decrease of household's income and labouring capacity.
- Husband required medical treatment for severe headache.
- Husband’s poor health. Insufficient income for 2 dependents.
- Husband cured from chronic headache and works again.
- Second child's birth.
- Anita works as a housemaid and handicraft maker.
- Second child's birth.