INTRODUCTION

Farida is a 60 year-old women living with her son in coastal Bangladesh. She was abandoned 20 years ago by her husband who left her to marry a second time and now lives close by with his second wife. She is the mother of three daughters and two sons with her husband. After her abandonment, Farida was forced to seek help from relatives in order to maintain her family. She is a religious-minded women praying five
times a day, and wears borkha\(^1\) to maintain purdah\(^2\). She is reluctant to be involved in work outside the home, but is compelled to do so in order to make ends meet. Despite the abandonment, she is still in contact with her husband, though they have very poor relations and she is supported only very rarely by him.

Because she could not support them on her own without her husband’s help, all of Farida’s three daughters were married off at an early age (between 12-15 years). Farida still had to manage all the costs associated with the ceremonies, and did this through asset sales and support from her own maternal relations (sisters and uncle). Currently she is living with her second son, sewing cloths and gathering fish fries.

WELL-BEING JUST BEFORE THE SHIREE INTERVENTION

Farida engaged with SHIREE in October 2010. Before this, her well-being could be summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Just before the intervention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well-being category</td>
<td>working extreme poor</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Diets                              | 2 meals per day (on average) for her son but she tries to have smaller quantities of food three times per day to spread it out. She has potato curry with cheap green vegetables most days and also has fish curry once or twice a week when her son can manage to pay from his income as a day labourer. They reduce the amount of rice in each meal further in lean (monsoon) periods.  
  When her son doesn’t get work, she often has to purchase food on credit from her son-in-law’s shop. Sometimes her elder daughter provides some food support to them. |
| Livelihoods now (in terms of contribution to that years’ income) | Farida  
  1. Stitching kantha (quilt) for nine months, getting 500 taka per month  
  2. Catching fish fries in the local river for three months (end of March to early June), earning 300/400 per week for those months.  
  Son:  
  1. Day labour  
  2. Catching fish fries in the river for three months (jointly with his mother) |
| For other principal adult member    | They possess a small amount of poultry. |
| Productive assets now rank them in terms of value | |

\(^1\) an enveloping outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions to cover their bodies in public places  
\(^2\) the practice of concealing women from men
QUALITATIVE MONITORING OF SHRIEE INTERVENTIONS: CMS5 (S) LIFE HISTORY AND INTERVENTION TRACKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(e.g. land, livestock, rickshaws),</th>
<th>Three to four decimals of homestead land is owned by her husband. She owns a wooden table and chair.</th>
<th>Her house is in reasonable condition with 2 rooms and a balcony.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House and homestead: ownership, condition of tenure, condition of house.</td>
<td>Her husband has stopped giving support over the last fifteen years and most of the time two of her elder sister and one younger sister help her by giving her money, food and clothes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations of support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

LIFE HISTORY NARRATIVE

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Farida Begum was born in 1961 in Randa, 30 kilometres from Barokhal union. Her father was a dofa
d and had a house in Randa Bazar with 66 decimals of khas land. Her maternal grandfather was wealthy and owned 15 bighas of agricultural land, giving Farida’s mother 20 decimals of land.

Farida had two elder brothers and two elder sisters. She has rarely received any support from her brothers in her life as one was disabled and the other was relatively poor also. Both brothers have passed away in recent years. However Farida has a great-uncle (a grandparents’ brother) who is reasonably well-off and has supported her in times of crisis.

Her eldest sister studied up to class ten, married a traffic policeman and now lives in Khulna, though for the last ten years she has suffered from paralysis and just three months back her husband died. Her second sister studied up to class eight and was married to a policeman. She lives in Bogra district with her family though recently, her husband died and she has become dependent on her daughter’s government primary school teacher salary.

Farida herself studied up to class five but because of poor finances following her father’s death, she could not continue her studies. While her father was alive, their economic condition was reasonable, and he had good relations with the local police officers, entertaining police officers regularly.

3 an informer of the local government institution (Union Parishad). They alert police about criminals in the locality
**Father’s death from snakebite**

Her father died from snakebite in 1962 when she was only five years old. She explains that in his job as a dofad (informant), he would collect information about criminals, making a number of local enemies whom she believes murdered him with a black snake after a disagreement. After the death of her father, Farida’s second brother took over his father’s job.

**Land grabbing**

With no savings and no permanent settlement on their own homestead land, the family suffered a lot after the death of Farida’s father. Her mother could not continue to pay the money necessary to retain access to their 66 decimals of government khas land and soon it was taken by local land grabbers. It was desirable as it was centrally located near the Union Parishad office.

Her mother often had to seek help from her parents and brothers to support and feed the large seven-member family. Farida’s grandparents provided rice, vegetables and cash. At that time Farida was only five years old but she noticed that two of her elder sisters including her mother would make chapattis for a local orphanage. The officer from orphanage would provide flour and cash to them and they would cook the chapattis at night ready for the morning. As they were from well-off lineage, her mother was reluctant to go outside the home for work.

**EARLY MARRIED LIFE AND EARLY ADULTHOOD**

**Early marriage at 13**

One of Farida’s relatives in the village married the brother of Farida’s future husband. This relative chose Farida’s husband for her and her mother and maternal uncle arranged the marriage in 1974, when Farida was only 13; before she could receive the education that her older sisters had and that had enabled them to marry more well-off men.

During the marriage ceremony her husband gave her some clothes and one nose pin worth 100 to 150 taka at that time, and did not have any dowry demands. After the marriage, her husband started a betel leaf business with 700 taka.

**Mother’s death and failed inheritance of her mother’s land**

After suffering from fever, her mother died in 1975, just two months after Farida was married. Farida was supposed to inherit some land from her mother through her wealthy grandparents. However her maternal uncle took the land.

**BOX 1: Inheritance – women’s access to father’s and husband’s land**

Often daughters do not ask for their share of inherited land as they required dowry money and so to ask for the land would looks ‘greedy’ or shameful. In Farida’s case,
even though she was entitled to a share, she didn’t claim it, passing it to the maternal uncle. The man has supported her at various times in her life, including during her daughters’ marriage and crisis periods, but at his discretion, and Farida may have been better off if she had had legal ownership of that land.

**Livelihoods and diet in early married years**

After her marriage she began living at her in-law’s house. The household survived on the husband’s betel leaf business. From his earning, Farida could manage two meals a day and during this time, she bore two sons and three daughters. She says she maintained good relationships with her husband and his family members (her mother and sister-in-law) by taking on much of the household, including all household chores.

They used to cook 1.5 to 2 kgs of rice every day for eight people buying fish two or three times a week (as the price was cheap then). They would also have vegetables, but would eat very little meat. They were moderately poor at that time but not extreme poor.

**Could not support her children’s education**

Farida’s children all studied up to level 5 in a free government school, with one or two able to go on to the fee paying grade 6 and 7. However, Farida could not manage the cost of the education beyond that. Her elder son (now 32) studied up to class seven, and then worked with his father in his betel leaf business. Her elder daughter (now 30) studied up to class five and her second daughter (27) studied up to class six. Her second son (25) who is currently living with Farida and operating the betel leaf business studied up to class five at a Madrasa\(^4\) and is not married yet. Her youngest daughter (20) studied up to class five.

**The crisis of husband’s second marriage**

Farida’s husband married a second time in 1990. The second wife was 35 years old. At first, Farida did not understand on why her husband’s attitude changed towards her: he had started to beat her and would not return home at night. A few months later, her husband disclosed that he had married again and wanted to take his second wife into their home.

Farida did not have the option to go back to a family home and at the same time she had her five children to consider. Her elder sisters told her several times to divorce her husband, but she did do so, for the sake of her children. The sisters also offered Farida and her two younger children a place to stay in their homes but she refused in order to keep the children together.

As Farida and her husband had only one house with a balcony, Farida with her five children lived inside the room and slept on the mud floor while her husband stayed with his second wife on the balcony and slept in the bed. According to her, “It was

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\(^4\) Islamic religious school
very difficult to live in the same place with his second wife. Several times I have thought of suicide but due to my children I could not do it.” She also expressed that “most of the time I cried alone and did not know what to do”. From that point onwards, Farida never slept with her husband, though she was well known for being a beautiful woman. She thought her husband was afraid of his second wife’s reaction if he slept with Farida. For two years they all lived together in Farida’s home while Farida pretended (to avoid social disgrace) that her husband was sleeping with her and supporting her financially. According to Farida, if there is no male or husband, nobody will respect her in this society.

For short time he gave her 5 kgs of rice, 2 kgs of potato, and ½ kg of lentils to her, which was very inadequate for her households’ needs, but five years later his support had dwindled down to nothing. In fact for the last 15 years she has not received any support whatsoever from her husband; even though he had the financial capability (his second wife always had a lot of new clothes and other items). However, her sisters would give Farida some new and old clothes, so it was easy to pretend to the community that she was still married and receiving support.

Despite living in the same house, her husband never talked to her and never asked anything from her, upsetting Farida greatly. When they were married, she used to clean his clothes, fetch his water and cook for him giving her satisfaction according to the religious belief among rural wives that those who satisfy their husbands will go to heaven. Her husband would not even drink a glass of water from Farida for fear of the reaction of his second wife. She expressed her sorrow: “more gele her kapor dea jeno daphon na dai - I forbade my children when I die to cover my dead body with clothes from my husband”. After receiving no support for 15 years, she would refuse to clothes purchased by him even in death.

**Husband moves out and consequences for Farida**

After 2 years of living in the same house, her husband moved to another area at the request of his second wife and rented a house for 650 taka where he still lives with his second wife. Her husband sold his remaining 10 decimal agricultural lands during his second marriage, meaning Farida’s son would get no inheritance. His husband’s second wife bore two daughters with the elder daughter studying up to class ten and getting married. Farida’s husband spent a lot of money on this wedding, in contrast to those of Farida’s daughters whose weddings were not contributed to by him. Farida managed the expenses of the weddings, though her husband did attend the wedding ceremonies to fulfil his guardianship role; an important part of the ceremony.

**Diet after husband moved and stopped all support**

After her husband moved out his support continued to dwindle and Farida had extreme difficulties managing food for her children, cooking only 1.5 kg rice per day for six people. Farida, her eldest son and eldest daughter all had to reduce their daily intake of meals in order to provide food for the younger children. At this time she started working stitching quilts in order to support her family and would also receive
some help from her family, even staying with her children in the house of her maternal uncle for 10 to 15 days at a time. Due to her religious background and Talukder decent, she would not at this time work outside the home, and her two elder sisters provided money, food and clothes to her and her children. She considered migrating to work in a garments factory but both her elder daughters did not support this plan and she did not go.

**Arranging the early marriage of daughters and difficulty marrying daughters**

Farida arranged the marriages of her daughters at the early ages – 12, 14 and 15 respectively. She was concerned that it would be hard to marry them if they aged further as potential in-laws would demand a higher dowry that she could not pay without her husband’s support. Farida considered that men prefer young women, and even 25 can be ‘too old’ in some communities - a problem seen by women abandoned after one or two children.

Farida did not want to arrange marriage in her local community because of the problems with her husband, but in the end she had to accept two sons-in-law from the local community, as they would not demand any dowry. Thus her elder daughter got married in 1993 at the age of 12 to a grocer from the same village, who Farida considered a good man and had no dowry demands. Farida had to spend about 10,000 taka for wedding ceremony, and managed this with the support of her uncle, elder and younger sisters who also provided clothes for the wedding ritual.

Her second daughter was married in 1996 at the age of 14 to a man from an adjacent village who worked in a plastic factory in Feni but also had no dowry demand. She bore a son.

Finally Farida’s youngest daughter was married at the age of 15 to a local share-cropper and fisherman. To pay for this ceremony, Farida had to sell two wood trees she owned for 6,000 taka, while her uncle again gave 5,000 taka and her sister’s provided utensil and clothes to her youngest daughter.

**Income reduced due to elder son separation**

After the marriages of her daughters, Farida’s elder son was married in 1995. He then subsequently migrated to Chittagong with his wife to work as a rickshaw puller. After his father’s second marriage, he no longer wanted to work for his father.

This upset Farida who had hoped that her elder son would support her as she got older. She had wanted him to delay the marriage, but by 1997 he had left for Chittagong. He does not send any money home to Farida, although she is aware that he had been suffering from tuberculosis.

**Cyclone Sidr**

Farida suffered another shock in 2007 when Cyclone Sidr ripped the roof from her house and damaged the remaining structure. She received 1,000 taka from the Union
Council to repair her house but unlike other Sidr-affected vulnerable people, she did not receive a new house, as the Union believed, falsely, that she was getting support from her husband. Her two elder sisters also gave 1,000 taka each to rebuild her house.

During that time, there was also an influx of food relief. The Union Council gave her 45 kgs of rice, while NGOs also helped: BRAC provided 10 kgs of rice and Prodipan gave 20 kg of rice, 2 kg of salt, 2 litres oil, and 2 kg of lentils. With this relief support she managed the household’s food for three/four months and she was very much relieved because - unlike other times - “for those months we didn’t have to worry about our food”.

Despite her reservations about working outside the home, she did work under the government cash-for-work safety net programme for one month, receiving 125 taka per day. She comments:

“This was my first work outside the home and I was involved with plinth-raising work with an NGO called Shalpa. I used to go wearing borkha to hide from local people”.

She raised around 5,000 taka through this work and was happy to be able to invite her younger daughter, her husband and younger son to her house for a visit.

**Increased mobility**

Before her husband took his second wife, Farida did not travel around the village alone because of her religion, but when he left she was forced to go outside in order to take proper care of her and their children. Now Farida travels around the village, to her relatives’ houses without any assistance. She also knows how to travel to Khulna, Barisal, Borgra and Feni alone. She considers this a new skill learned acquired because of hardship.

**LATE ADULTHOOD**

**Dwindling support base**

Farida worries for the future. As she ages and begins to lose her physical mobility, she will also begin to lose support from her three sisters who have helped her so much over the years but who are also aging. Her eldest sister in Khulna is suffering from paralysis and is cared for by her daughter, while her son-in-law is working in an NGO. Her second sister, now a widow, lives in Borga, far away from Farida and is fully dependent on her daughter’s government primary school teacher income. Only her Farida’s youngest sister is doing ok, living in Barisal with her husband who owns a grocery shop.

As people in her community assume she has good relationship with her husband and is supported by him, assistance from NGOs and the Union Parishad has not been forthcoming. For instance, after the shiree intervention, her youngest daughter (who is pregnant) came for a visit with her husband. In order to protect them from shame,
Farida hid the fact that her relationship with her husband is so poor, assuring her daughter's in-laws that they would be fed well by Farida’s husband.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

After her father’s death, Farida’s life changed for the worse. She had to halt her education and as a woman did not claim her family land inheritance. In her marital life, her abandonment and the task of maintaining a large family on her own has made her fully dependent on her relatives.

Farida slowly spent her savings and assets to arrange her daughters’ marriage ceremonies, putting stress on her relationship with relatives and husband in asking for financial help. Like many extremely poor women, early marriage to avoid high dowry costs and vulnerability to the departure of male household members, both husbands and sons has been a feature of Farida’s life.

She is now in late adulthood; facing decreased working capacity as well as also decreased her sibling support. The financial situations of her three daughters are also poor, making it unlikely that they will be able to support her in her old age.
Life history map of Farida Begum (60)

- Moved into poverty as father died
- Stopped education due to poverty
- Husband continued his betel leaf business
- Dwindling support from husband
- Arranged daughters’ early marriage, through selling small assets and relatives’ support
- Arranged youngest daughter’s marriage – and distress sale of assets
- Husband stopped all support - she started work kantha stitching to support her family
- Reduced income due to elder son’s separation
- Cyclone SIDR
- Youngest son started earning
- Started working outside the home, got relief and recovered her position: mobility helped

- Early marriage
- Husband’s second marriage

Time:
- 1960
- 1970
- 1980
- 1990
- 2000
- 2010
- 2011