

LIFE HISTORY OF MAHFUJA BEGUM

Shiree Q2 Research on Extreme Poverty in Bangladesh				
Author	Saifuddin Ahmed			
Institution	CARE			
CMS1 Reference	552028310712			
Interviewee name	Mahfuja Begum	Sex		Age
		M		27
Livelihood before the intervention	Agriculture labourer & quilting			
Well- being Status before the intervention	Working Extreme Poor			
Marital status, children and other household members	Married, 2 children			
union, upazilla and zilla	Union- Shaptibari, Upazila- Aditmari, District- Lalmonirhat			
Dates of Interview	13/12/2010 & 30/06/2011			
Keywords	Silently female headed (within marriage), Working extreme poor, blacksmith, agriculture labourer, quilting, fist of rice savings, rug worker			

INTRODUCTION

Mahfuja was born in Durar Kuthi colony in 1984. Her father was a blacksmith and she is the youngest of three daughters born to her parents. In 1986, her elder sister got married and the brother-in-law started living with them. After two years in 1988, her father died of tuberculosis and her brother-in-law took on the responsibility of the entire family. In 1998, her brother-in-law arranged her marriage with an agricultural labourer and a dowry of taka 3500/- was paid. The beginning of her conjugal life was not that pleasant because her husband was reluctant to work. After few years, they became separated from her in-laws and Mahfuja struggled to maintain her entire family. Her husband's non-cooperation forced her to return her mother. But after few days, her husband returned to her and they started their life in a new way.

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WELL-BEING JUST BEFORE THE SHREE INTERVENTION

Mahfuja became involved with Shree in 2009.

Indicator	Just before the intervention
Well-being category	Working extreme poor
Diets	Often 2 meals a day with regular starvation during lean periods
Livelihoods now in terms of contribution to that years' income	1. Quilting work 1. Agriculture labour
For other principal adult member	
Productive assets now rank them in terms of value (e.g. land, livestock, rickshaws),	1. 5 decimal of homestead land
House and homestead: ownership, condition of tenure, condition of house.	Tin roof house on own homestead land

LIFE HISTORY NARRATIVE

EARLY CHILDHOOD & DEATH OF FATHER: 1984 – 1988

In 1984, Mahfuja was born to a working extreme poor family. His father was a blacksmith by profession and her mother was a simple housewife. Both her parents were illiterate. Mahfuja is the youngest of three daughters born to her parents. Mahfuja's father lived on 8 decimals of Government land (Bihari Colony) that is now allotted to her mother's name. They lived on her father's income from his blacksmith's job and could manage no more than 2 meals a day.

After giving her elder sister in marriage in 1986, her father fell into sever financial crisis and it became harder to manage 2 meals a day. A few days later, when her new brother – in- law started living in their house, her sister and the new husband were given one of the two rooms in the house for themselves. They also arranged their own meals. Mahfuja's father had tuberculosis and to maintain the cost of treatment her father started selling his blacksmith's tools. During this time the family used to starve quite regularly.

In 1988, two years after the marriage of the elder sister, Mahfuja's father died of tuberculosis. To help support the family her mother started working as a housemaid. In addition, her mother continued to sell her father's blacksmith's tools.

CHILDHOOD WITH NO CHANGE IN LIVELIHOOD: 1989 - 1994

Mahfuja's childhood did not have much negative effect on her life. She was four when her father died and Mahfujah's mother always worked as a housemaid. In 1989 her second sister started working as maid in return for food only. Mahfuja's elder sister took care of her. In 1991 her brother-in-law took steps to make sure Mahfuja's was admitted to school. Moreover, during that time her elder sister took on full responsibility for her as she started having her

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meals with them. During this time she had nothing to worry about with regards to daily meals.

CHANGES IN LIFE AND REMAINING DESTITUTE: 1995 – 2001

At 13 Mahfuja is withdrawn from school to marry

In 1995, Mahfuja's mother arranged the marriage of the second daughter and spent taka 2000/- as dowry. Her brother-in-law managed the dowry amount while her mother spent 700/- taka of her savings for the marriage ceremony. During that time Mahfuja was 13 and was going regularly to school, but her mother wanted her to work as maid and earn money. In this circumstance, in 1998, her brother-in-law arranged her marriage with Jahadul Islam, an agricultural labourer. Her brother – in – law also paid the 3500/- taka dowry.

Husband was indolent and beat her

At the very start of her conjugal life Mahfuja realized that her husband was quite indolent and did not want work. In addition, the prospect of finding work in her husband's area was quite restricted and wages were generally low. It became difficult to manage members' household which included parents-in-law. With no reason and justification Mahfuja's husband started beating her frequently.

In 2000, when her first daughter was born, Mahfuja's husband did not have any work and they had fallen into deep trouble. They could only dream of having 2 meals per day. When frustrations built up, her husband started beating her regularly for very minor reasons.

In 2001, at the point of extreme destitution, her daughter became paralyzed. Mahfuja did not have any means to pay for treatment. She did not receive any support from anyone in family or neighbours. After a few days, her daughter died. This deeply shocked Mahfuja and she had to carry on living in a state of extreme misery.

TAKING FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY ON HER SHOULDERS: 2002 – 2005

Mahfuja and her husband separated from her in-laws in 2002. In her own family she had to take all the responsibility as her husband was still reluctant to work. He had no money, no savings, no intention to do anything, but still he would beat Mahfuja when he did not find any food at house. To maintain the family Mahfuja had to start working as maid and during the peak seasons, she also worked as an agricultural labourer. That year her second child born and due extreme hardship she become physically sick.

In 2005, all of a sudden there was a scarcity of work for female labourers. Like other labourers Mahfuja also had to face the uncertainty triggered by few opportunities. As her husband still did not work, she with her child often went by starving. With real hardship and her husband beating her, Mahfuja returned to her mother's house. A few days later, her husband also came to her as her in-laws house had been eroded by the river.

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UPS-AND -DOWNS IN LIVELIHOODS: 2006 – 2008

Returning to her mother, Mahfuja built a shed for her family on her mother's land. Both husband and wife started working. In that year, she got a VGD card worth 25kg wheat for 20 months and their food became secure during this time. But the problem came from her husband who blamed her for being a bad character and the quarrels began. Mahfuja made an important decision, left her husband and migrated to Dhaka. There she lived for 3 months and earned money through working as maid servant. After three months she returned home and started living with her husband again.

Again in 2007, the family condition became worse as Mahfuja gave birth to her third child. While pregnant she could not work. Her husband's work situation had also deteriorated, because work opportunities had fallen as a result of the price hike. This harsh situation got worse still when her new child got pneumonia and she could not give him proper treatment. In She therefore went to a money lender and borrowed 5000/- taka with 20% interest. This was the lowest point in her life.

In 2008, Mahfuja received 5000/- taka loan from RDRS monga mitigation fund. With this and her husband's income she started repaying the money lender's loan. Moreover, in that year she became involved with CARE's NIJERA project. It turned out she was good at quilting and this gave her the opportunity to be involves with the NIJERA quilting group and earn money. From this point her situation started to improve. . She started saving a fist full of rice in her community savings group. Their food security situation improved and they became more confident to take a loan from BRAC for their child's treatment.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Mahfuja has experienced the harshness of life and extreme destitution. She also struggled in her conjugal life, but she never gave up hope. She tried hard in all possible ways to pull the family from deep problems.

LIFE HISTORY MAP

Poverty Level:

1. Destitute
2. Working Extreme Poor
3. 'Moderate' Poor
4. Lower Earning, Non-Poor
5. Middle Elite and
6. Wealthy Elite: same as middle elite, but much larger in scale (of investments, of local power etc.).

Dates	Well-being movement	Reasons – summarise the section and this should correspond in theory to your subheadings
1984 - 1988	Downward Mobility 2 – 1	Born to a working extreme poor family. Her father was blacksmith by profession. After marrying off her elder sister in 1986 her father fell into severe financial crisis and it became

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		harder to manage two meals a day. Mahfuja's father had tuberculosis and to maintain the cost of treatment her father started selling his blacksmithing tools. In 1988 Mahfuja's father died of tuberculosis and to maintain family expenses her mother started working as housemaid.
1989-1994	Remained at 1	Mahfuja's childhood did not negatively affect her life. Her elder sister took care of her. In 1991 her brother-in-law enrolled her in the school. Mahfuja
1995-2001	Remained at 1	In 1995, Mahfuja's mother arranged the marriage of her second daughter. In 1998, her brother-in-law arranged her marriage with Jahadul Islam, an agricultural labourer. Her husband was quite indolent and did not want to work. In 2000, her first daughter born. In 2001, at the point of extreme destitution, her daughter became paralyzed. After a few days, her daughter died.
2002 - 2005	Remained at 1	Mahfuja and her husband separated from her in-laws in 2002. That year her second child was born and due extreme hardship she becomes physically sick. In 2005, all of a sudden there was a scarcity of work for female labourers. , Mahfuja returned to her mother's house.
2006 - 2008	Upward Mobility to 2	Returning to her mother, Mahfuja built a shed for her on her mother's land. Both husband and wife started working. In that year, she received a VGD card worth 25kg wheat for 20 months. Their food security situation improved. She migrated to Dhaka to work as a housemaid. Mahfuja gave birth to her third child, and during that time she could not work. She went to money lender and took out a 5000/- taka loan with 20% interest. In 2008, Mahfuja received a 5000/- taka loan from RDRS monga mitigation fund. She was good at quilting and started working with the NIJERA quilting group.

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LIFE HISTORY MAP OF MAHFUJA BEGUM (27)

