Parboti (24) is the head of her family as her husband is deaf. She was born on 1st March 1988 into a working extreme poor family. Her father Nironjon Mondal was a vegetable seller and her mother Lokkhi Mondal was an agricultural labourer. They still are doing these jobs. She has two sisters and one brother and is her parents’ second child. When she was younger her family could only afford two meals per day for five months, reducing to one meal per day in the remaining seven months of the “lean period”.

She married Om Par, a fisherman, in 2008 who is both deaf and mute and came from a moderate poor family. He lived in a joint family with his mother and his younger brother at the time of their marriage. However, their household separated within one year of marriage. His mother is an agricultural labourer and his brother a fisherman. They have one baby, a girl aged two years and ten month named Shathi and Parboti is now eight months pregnant.

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

In February 2012, the household became involved with the shiree programme, before the intervention their well-being was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Just before the intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well-being category</td>
<td>Destitute (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diets</td>
<td>For 4 months they got 1 and half meals per day but during the 8 month lean period they had to rely on her mother-in-law who helped them by providing some rice to cook. At times however they couldn’t eat at all. The respondent reported having nothing to eat 2-3 days a week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranked Livelihoods now in terms of contribution to that years’ income</td>
<td>1. Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For other principal adult member</td>
<td>Parboti’s husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Helper of fisherman</td>
<td>1. Helper of fisherman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive assets now rank them in terms of value</td>
<td>2 decimal homestead land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. land, livestock, rickshaws),</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House and homestead: ownership, condition of tenure, condition of house.</td>
<td>Own house, measuring 6’ X 12’, with a tin roof and straw/leaf wall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIFE HISTORY NARRATIVE

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH (1998-2007)

Parboti grew up in an extremely poor medium sized family (six members). She was food insecure during her childhood. Her father was involved in petty vegetable trading and her mother was an agricultural labourer. They had no homestead land or agricultural land. Because they had no productive assets, during lean periods or emergencies she only got one and half meals per day.

Poverty and child labour

Parboti enrolled herself in the government primary school when her friends went to school. However, after completion of class II she interrupted her studies because the household could not afford the costs of her education. She reported that many of her friends stopped studying for similar reasons at the same time. At ten years old, she then started working as a housemaid. Parboti said that all of her childhood friends, who were in similar economic conditions, became child labourers. She also reported that her Hindu family was excluded from the community and were discriminated against by both Muslim and Hindu elite families because her family was scheduled caste.

As a housekeeper, she earned 500 taka per month and three daily meals. She gave her earnings to her parents. She kept this job till her adulthood. She did not have the opportunity to play with friends because she had to work to support her family. When she became an adult (age 13) her mother stopped her from working as a housemaid in order to protect her from any verbal or physical abuse. During this period her elder sister worked in garments in Dhaka but did not contribute to Parboti’s household’s earnings and saved to pay her dowry, Parboti however never spent a penny on herself from her earnings.

Box 1: Discrimination in the access to labour and safety nets

Potibari is one of the villages of Satla union in Uzipur upazila at Barisal district, where Parboti lived with her parents. A key reason Parboti’s family was so poor was the limited employment opportunities exacerbated by discrimination between Hindus and Muslims. Hindu workers were excluded in favour of Muslim workers. Most of the land owners were from Muslim families who preferred Muslim labour to work their agricultural land.
Discrimination in the provision of support and safety nets

During lean periods, it was challenging to manage work and to get support from Muslim non-poor or other Muslim elites or from the few Hindu elites for Hindu labourers. Muslim households generally had better access to social safety net programmes.

Result Child labour

As a consequence, adult Hindu labourers depended on their children’s earnings. Other children from the extremely poor Hindu families were involved in child labour in Parboti’s village. Most of her childhood friends did not complete the primary level because they had to drop out of school to earn before they could reach class three. Due to the discrimination towards their parents, the lack of earning capacity of her Hindu household excluded Parboti from the society, as she needed to work to earn her household’s livelihood.

Graduation from Working Extreme Poor (2) to Moderate Poor (3)

Parboti’s household members managed to uplift themselves from working extreme poor (2) to moderate poor (3) when she was 17 years old. There were two main factors which contributed to help them achieve it. Firstly her elder sister, who was married, left her husband and contributed to Parboti’s household’s earnings. Secondly, her younger brother started to work on a fishing boat earning 1,500 taka per month which he also contributed to her households’ income. As a result, with three income sources and only two dependents the households’ income grew significantly up to approximately 2700 Taka per month. During this time, they all managed to eat three meals per day incorporating fish/egg/pulse (dal) as side dishes and ate meat once a month.

MARRIED LIFE AND EARLY ADULTHOOD  (2008-2012)

In 2008, at the age of 20, Parboti got married to Om Par (28) in Chadmoni (Hindu para) in Otra union at Uzirpur upazila. Om is deaf and slightly mentally instable, therefore his capacity to earn and labour is limited, “He does not do anything other than catching hilsa”, she said.

Extreme poor marriage with no dowry cost

Parboti’s family had tried to get a bridegroom for their daughter when she was 16 years old, but they failed because they were unable to afford her dowry and marriage expenditures. At that time a match maker told her sister’s husband about Om. Parboti’s brother-in-law met the bridegroom’s family and discussed about Parboti, acting as a middle man in their
marriage. He told her, “Om is deaf but he is a good fisherman and he earns much money. If you marry him you will get a happy life”. Om’s family had no dowry demand which Parboti says was one of the major reasons she married him. Parboti’s family spent 30,000 taka on her marriage ceremony which is a fortune for a poor family like hers. Compared to what they earned the amount spent was considerable but necessary in order to honour their religious (Hindu community) culture and traditions.

**Early married life**

For the first one year of her marriage, Parboti was very happy. They had three earning family members and one dependent. Her mother-in-law worried when Parboti wanted to get involved in income generating activities outside of the homestead. Because Om was deaf, mute and suffered from poor health, she worried about Parboti becoming interested in someone else. From that time onwards Parboti looked after the household and took charge of all the family chores and worked in her in-laws’ house as a housewife. After marriage she lived on three to two meals per day like the other members of her household.

**Box 2: Dowry is a curse**

Parboti said that many girls of her community who reached age of marriage could not do it because the amounts of dowry demanded by the families are too high compared to what Hindu extreme poor families can earn. Whilst none of them can get married without paying a dowry, Parboti managed to do it because she married a deaf man.

Parboti said her elder sister was “cleverer” than her because she worked as a garment worker for almost two years in Dhaka and managed to save for her dowry and get married. Parboti on the contrary, was not interested to go out of her home to work because she heard that many garments female workers went missing and faced problems including verbal and sexual harassment. Parboti’s parents spent 35,000 taka on her sister’s dowry and 20,000 taka on other wedding expenses.

Her brother-in-law was a TV mechanic. Parboti mentioned that, if any bridegroom comes from a moderate poor family, then their demand for dowry is no less than 20,000 taka with few gold ornaments. When the bridegroom is a farmer the dowry is higher.
**Moved down to Destitute (1)**

After one year of marriage, Om’s brother got married and Parboti’s mother-in-law separated from them to live with him.

At that time Parboti was two months pregnant. Her husband worked hard to earn a sufficient income and feed his household but could still not afford food three times a day throughout the year. They had two meals per day during Jousto to Vaddro (4 months in a year (see seasonal livelihood opportunity map below) but only one and a half meal daily, during the 8 month lean period, thanks to the support from her mother-in-law.

The household’s earnings were low for two reasons. First Parboti did not have any income generating activity or occupation. Second, although her husband was a good fisherman, he was deaf and was affected by *kan pacca* (*local name for ear infection*) after one year of their marriage. His condition became chronic because he could not afford to consult a doctor and so the infection worsened. As a result, Om could only work fewer days than if he had been healthy.

*Hilsa* fishermen usually go fishing at night till the dawn and sell their fish during the day. The risk of natural calamities (such as cyclone, tidal surge) makes their job riskier, and as Om was disabled, he was afraid of fishing at night. He had to pay to get some help from other fishermen which reduced his income. The whole year became a lean period for them, even the *hilsa* fishing season (Jousto to Vaddro, 4 months in a year).

In the months of Asher and Srabon which is the peak season for *hilsa* fishing (see the seasonal livelihood opportunity map) Om earned 100 taka daily helping other fishermen, as he was unable to do work regularly on his own. He worked 15 days per month during the peak season (two months in a year). During the lean season, four to five days he works as a fishing helper with others and earns 30/40 take daily. Although he is skilled in *hilsa* fishing, his disability makes it difficult for him to earn. The total yearly income of the household was 3,150 to 3,200 taka.

When asked why her husband doesn’t to agricultural labouring in his spare time, Parboti replied that he doesn’t know how to do field labouring and lacks expertise.
**Parboti is destitute but is not permitted to work**

The family would benefit from another income source but Parboti’s mother-in-law is not willing to let her work as a housemaid in other people’s house because she fears that Parboti might be sexually harassed, have an affair or that people gossip about her. Even if she was allowed to work previously, because she is now eight-months pregnant it would be difficult for her to earn an income.

**CONCLUSION**

Parboti’s well-being experienced significant variations before and after her marriage. Although she was born in an extreme poor working household she and her siblings managed to earn enough income to afford food three times a day. She had to quit school to work at a young age in order to cover her family’s expenses. With her brother finding a job and her sister getting married the household’s income increased significantly and become moderate poor.

She then managed to get married to a mute and deaf man without having to pay the dowry (that she could not afford). However after the marriage her well-being declined and she became extreme poor again, because her husband was not able to earn a stable and regular income and her mother-in-law did not allow her to work outside the homestead. During this period, her and her husband got cut off from the extended family as the mother-in-law decided to live with her other son. Their situation kept worsening as their child was growing and their food needs increased. Her husband got a health problem which he could not afford to cure and that affected his working ability and as a result, their income.

Before they got included into the programme Parboti was destitute with no productive assets or working capacity and few social networks. Her family gets one and half meals per day with support from her mother-in-law, but have to starve themselves two to three days a week because they cannot afford food for themselves and want to make sure that their daughter is fed (even if the food that she eats is donated by relatives and neighbours). As Parboti is eight months pregnant her nutritional requirements are clearly not met and her food insecurity is likely to affect her health and the health of her baby in the future.

Exclusion from the labour market and from safety nets is a major reason for her destitution. Her husband (disabled Hindu) and her (young pregnant woman) are both denied access to income generating activities from different reasons. Because they are excluded from the largely Muslim community, Parboti’s household was identified by iDE to be included in the shirree programme.
## Seasonal Livelihood Opportunity Map

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangla</td>
<td>Magh</td>
<td>Falgun</td>
<td>Chaitra</td>
<td>Boishak</td>
<td>Joishtha</td>
<td>Ashar</td>
<td>Srabon</td>
<td>Bhadho</td>
<td>Asshin</td>
<td>Kartik</td>
<td>Agrahayan</td>
<td>Poush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fishing season of hilsa fish</strong></td>
<td>Lean period</td>
<td>Low season</td>
<td>Peak season for hilsa fishing</td>
<td>Low season</td>
<td>Lean period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1: Parboti’s well-being movement by year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Well-being movement</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Poverty level 2</td>
<td>Parboti was born in working extreme poor family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Moved up to 3</td>
<td>Her brother got a secured job paying 1500 taka monthly and her elder sister got married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Shift level 3 to 2</td>
<td>Got married into a working extreme poor family with a disabled husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Moved level 2 to 1</td>
<td>Separated from joint family and income was reduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Well-being level 1</td>
<td>Husband got sick and could not earn a stable income from fishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Moved at the bottom line of level 1</td>
<td>Parboti is pregnant not allowed to work and her husband is chronically sick and unable to do work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parboti was born into a working extreme poor family.

Parboti’s younger brother got a secure job with high monthly income.

Her brother-in-law got married and they separated from the joint family.

Parboti marries Om (no dowry), who is deaf and lived in a joint family. They afford 2 daily meals.

Parboti’s younger brother got a secure job with high monthly income.

Parboti marries Om (no dowry), who is deaf and lived in a joint family. They afford 2 daily meals.

Her brother-in-law got married and they separated from the joint family.

Parboti falls pregnant and she was unable to work.

Om became sick and was afraid to go to the river at night for fishing.

Parboti is eight month pregnant, she cannot work and she relies on other people’s donation to eat and feed her 3 people household.

Decrease of household’s income and high dependency ratio.

Om becomes chronically sick.

Parboti falls pregnant and she was unable to work.

Om became sick and was afraid to go to the river at night for fishing.

Parboti is eight month pregnant, she cannot work and she relies on other people’s donation to eat and feed her 3 people household.

Decrease of household’s income and high dependency ratio.

Om becomes chronically sick.

Parboti falls pregnant and she was unable to work.

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