

# Vermicompost, a story of organic gold: miracles in Rezia's family

Ulashi Sreejony Sangha, Jessore, Bangladesh

Mrs. Rezia Begum (38), a marginalized farmer, faced serious problems in feeding her family members two meals a day. Mrs. Begum lives in Lebutala under Jessore Sadar sub-district. This area is one of the largest vegetable producing unions in Bangladesh. Traditionally farmers utilize chemical fertilizers and pesticides to produce high crop yield. However, due to excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, soil fertility declined substantially. So, farmers have to apply increased quantity of fertilizers every year. Due to application of excessive pesticides and chemical fertilizers, outbreaks of pests have increased. Mrs. Begum had small piece of land where she used to cultivate seasonal vegetables and feed her family and earn money by selling surplus products.

Farmers in this areas struggle to generate income, as the production cost increased due to reduction of soil fertility, outbreak of pests, prolonged drought and declination of ground water table. Farmers are applying chemical fertilizers to grow more crops as they are not well aware of harmful effects of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Like Mrs. Begum, USS identified marginalized & small land holders in this area through focus group discussion and community consultation meeting. The project then formed a farmer field school where Mrs. Begum elected as president of the group. She is attending farmers monthly meeting, has received training on vermicompost production and herbal pesticide preparation followed by input support (2 chari and 900 g earthworm). She lacks knowledge on vermicompost production, utilization on her field and preparation of herbal pesticides, so this project included her to build her farming skills and aware her on safe food production.

After receiving training and vermicompost production input, Mrs. Begum has started to produce vermicompost and utilize in her crop field. Initially, she was struggling to produce vermicompost as her husband did not take it positively and daughter was afraid of earthworm. Her neighbors criticized her. And she felt that she is doing bad thing. But as soon as she utilized compost to her field, Mrs. Begum's neighbors observed the vegetable color, and vigorous growth. Her family members changed their mindset after taking the vegetables grown using vermicompost. She shared her learning to her neighbor, and also facilitated several safe food production trainings hired by different NGOs. As a president of farmers field school, she assists group members, contributes safe food production movement. During the reporting period, she has sold 2.5 metric tons vermicompost equivalent of 30000 BDT and 12 kilogram of earthworm worth 16000 BDT. So, on an average her month income from vermicompost and earthworm sale is 4000 BDT. In addition, she has applied more than 1.8 metric tons vermicompost to her crop field.

Her husband was reluctant and discourages her to involve with such activities. Now, her husband is also working with her after realizing that vermicompost production gives them profit and they can consume safe food grown by using vermicompost. Her husband and daughter assisted to construct a tin shaded house for vermicompost production. Now she has 20 chari and would like to extend upto 100 by the year 2017.



Figure 1: Rezia Begum on her safe vegetable field (left), in front of her vermicompost production house (right) (photo: Khusnur Jahan Shapna, MLO, USS)

**“I stand for cultivation of safe vegetables using vermicompost and herbal pesticides, because vermicompost reduced my hardship and now I can feed my family three meals (safe food) a day. I am grateful to CAFOD and UK AID for their generous support.”**

***Rezia Begum, President, Beer Narayanpur vermicompost producer group***