

The Impact of Agricultural Credit on the Social and Economic Empowerment of Tenant Farmers in Bangladesh

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Personal Background

From a young age, I decided that I wanted to be a pioneer. Like Laura Ingalls Wilder's, my family was close and tight knit. We cooked together, worked together, and, well, fought together. The Little House on the Prairie books were centered about food. Food, and the quest to obtain it, was the driving force of frontier life. My aspirations to become a pioneer – and delusions that it was still possible to be Laura in the 21st Century – were fueled by the way my family interacted with food. My father grew up on a dairy farm, and, as he always says, “you can take the boy outta the farm but can't take the farm outta the boy.” So cows we obtained. Each spring, we got ourselves filthy as we planted our garden. Beets, radishes, tomatoes, peppers, beans, onions, pumpkins, cucumbers, carrots.... We watered them, weeded them, shoed deer away from them. Eating that first sugar-snap pea, still warm from the sun-drenched vine, made it all worth it. I'll never forget the feeling of dirt between my toes. In the fall, we pickled our cucumbers, canned our peaches, jellied our plums, and made salsa from our tomatoes. My parents have always made sure that we know where our food comes from.

As I grew older, I realized that being a pioneer in the way I had dreamed of (covered wagons! Log cabins!) was impossible in this day and age. “You were born in the wrong century,” my teachers told me. “There's no such thing as a ‘pioneer’ anymore.” Every day, though, I opened the newspaper and read about scientists researching new cures for diseases, engineers devising new systems of data transport, diplomats forging new treaties to try and create a more peaceful world. I read these things. I read about these people and realized that my teachers were wrong. There are still pioneers today. Instead of a covered wagon, their method of discovery is a laboratory, a classroom, or the UN Assembly. There are always new frontiers.

Once I realized that being a pioneer was not impossible, I picked up the shattered pieces of my childhood dream and began searching for my frontier. Part of that search took me to the Minnesota Association of Student Councils State Convention in 2013. There, Kay Ellingson, coordinator of the Minnesota Youth Institute and Tessa Ries, former Borlaug-Ruan intern, spoke about the World Food Prize, Dr. Norman Borlaug, and the Global Youth Institute. My interest was piqued. I was tremendously interested in both science (for the past 4 summers, I had been working at STEPS, an engineering camp for middle school girls) and global affairs (I was an extemporaneous speaker, news junkie, and student of Arabic.) The program seemed like a perfect blend of my two interests. So, in between working as a lab assistant at UW-Stout and a two-week Arabic immersion, I wrote a paper on urban malnutrition in Egypt, presented it at the Minnesota Youth Institute, and was selected to represent Minnesota at the Global Youth Institute.

So, with a minivan as my covered wagon, I set off for Des Moines. What I witnessed and partook in there was beyond my wildest imagination. Being surrounded by passionate, driven students as well as world and industry leaders was an opportunity I never anticipated being given. I had found my frontier. Now, all I needed was my Oregon Trail. In an effort to continue my journey, I applied for a Borlaug-Ruan internship. After being inspired at the GYI, I didn't want to waste any time contributing to the fight against food insecurity. Imagine my excitement, then, when a mere five

months later, I was informed that I would be given the experience of a lifetime: eight weeks in Dhaka, Bangladesh, interning with BRAC.

Bangladesh: an extremely abbreviated history

Until 1947, the country now known as Bangladesh was part of the Indian province of Bengal. When India and Pakistan parted, the primarily-Muslim eastern half of Bengal split off and became known as East Pakistan until 1971, when a brief, bloody liberation war was fought. From that point on, East Pakistan became Bangladesh: an independent, self-governing country. Bangladesh is the eighth-most populous country in the world, at 166 million, and this number is only growing. With this many people living in a nation that is approximately the size of Wisconsin, overpopulation is putting strains on Bangladesh's infrastructure, food supply, natural resources, and land. However, Bangladesh is on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, and is projected to become a middle-income country in 2021.

BRAC: creating opportunities for the world's poor

Founded in 1972, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed began the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee to help the country recover from a devastating cyclone. What began as a small-scale initiative in Sulla soon expanded. Nine months after its inception, the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee was rechristened the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee and given focus of long-term development and the empowerment of the poor, especially women and children. Over the next forty years, BRAC expanded into the world's largest NGO. With programs ranging from pre-primary education to agriculture to disaster relief to migration, BRAC is attacking poverty from all angles. It has operations in eleven countries, plus offices in the United States and United Kingdom. As it expanded into different nations and missions, BRAC outgrew the name "Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee" and is no longer an acronym. In 2013, BRAC was ranked number one on Global Journal's list of the best 100 NGOs in the world.

BRAC's stated vision is "a world free from all forms of exploitation and discrimination, where everyone has the opportunity to realize their potential." Its mission, described in its 2013 Annual Report, is to "empower people and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease, and social injustice. [Its] interventions aim to achieve large scale, positive changes through economic and social programmes that enable women and men to realize their potential." Currently, BRAC employs over 100,000 people and has reached 130 million across the globe.

Borga Chashi Unnayan Prokalpo

Background

In Bangladesh, rural landlessness is becoming increasingly common. From 1987 to 2008, the number of functionally landless households (defined as those owning less than .5 acre) has increased from 37% to 59%. However, despite large amounts of rural-to-urban migration, the number of farm households in Bangladesh has increased from 6.1 million in 1960 to 14.87 million in 2008. Instead of selling their land those who migrate to non-farm activities rent it out in small

parcels to relatives and former laborers, thus maximizing rent. This is responsible for the increasing number of farm households, paired with decreasing farm size (1.43 hectares in 1960 to .60 hectares in 2008) (Hossain, Malek, and Das).

Thus, tenancy is becoming more and more prevalent in Bangladesh, and farming is, increasingly, in the hands of small and marginal farmers. As agriculture advances, new innovations that require greater input are developed; however, farmers rarely have working capital enough to purchase what is necessary to shift to these new technologies. Agricultural credit can provide the funds necessary to drive progress.

However, small farmers, and especially tenant farmers, do not have access to formal credit markets. Because tenant farmers do not have any assets to provide as collateral, they are not considered for loans. Lending to tenant farmers is risky – without collateral, there is no incentive to repay. Thus, they are often excluded from formal credit markets. This means that the only credit available – if there is any at all – is that which is offered through informal markets. These may take the forms of loans from traditional moneylenders, wealthy landowners, as collateral against household assets and land, or as advanced sale of crops and labor below market prices. Interest charges are usually also very high.

However, credit is an undeniable enabler of empowerment. Microfinance organizations generally do not target farm activities, and often are conditioned by a land-holdings requirement (Hossain, Malek, and Das). Thus, marginal farmers, especially tenant farmers, are further excluded from credit markets.

In order to address this need, BRAC introduced the Borga Chashi Unnayan Prokalpo (BCUP), which is known as the Tenant Farmer Development Project. Initiated in December of 2009, BCUP provides farmers loans at a subsidized 10 percent interest rate. Free extension services, aimed at improving farming practices, are included upon enrollment in the program. As stated by RED Working Paper No. 40:

“The main objective of the project is to reduce dependence of tenant farmers on high-cost informal markets for financing their working capital needs as they do not have access to the formal financial institutions. These poor farmers are also usually bypassed by the extension services of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) under the Ministry of Agriculture. So, the supplementary objective of the project is to provide them knowledge on modern technology and crop management practices free of charge.”

The funding for the program came from the Central Bank of Bangladesh, which gave BRAC Tk 500 Crore (US\$ 70 million) refinancing facility at a 5% annual rate of interest. The fund was initially given for three years with the intent of reaching 300,000 farmers. Due to the program’s success, in 2012 the project was extended for another three years (Bangladesh Agriculture & Food Security: Tenant Farmers Development Programme).

Selection Criteria

Any farmer who operates less than two acres (200 decimels), with the majority rented, and who has not taken a loan from a financial institution is eligible. As part of the program, members attend monthly Village Organization (VO) meetings where information on agricultural practices and the repayments are collected. Initially, the BCUP program was only targeted towards men. However, it was found that men had little interest in attending these monthly meetings. Moreover, BRAC discovered that more often than not, men were employed in non-farm enterprises while women managed the farm. In light of this, the BCUP program was extended to women in 2011 (Tenant Farmers Development Project).

Loan Structure and Repayments

The BCUP program offers loans of up to Taka 120,000 at a flat 10% interest rate per year. One third of the loan is paid off in ten equal monthly installments, while the other two thirds are collected in bulk payment after each of the two major harvests.

Components	Features	Purpose covered
General credit	Credit limit: Taka 5,000-30,000; Duration: 6-10 months; Grace period: 1 month Instalment: Monthly; Interest rate: 10% (flat)	Reduce working capital deficiency and reliance on non-institutional money-lenders
Machinery credit	Credit limit: Taka 30,000-120,000 Duration: 6-10 months; Grace period: 1 month Instalment: Monthly; Interest rate: 10% (flat)	Incentive to the tenant farmers to modernize and increase productivity in agriculture.
Land lease credit	Credit limit: Taka 30,000-60,000 Duration: 6-10 months; Grace period: 1 month Instalment: Monthly; Interest rate: 10% (flat) BRAC acts as a mediator between tenant farmers and land-owners	It will increase the access to land through tenancy in the short run and increase their entitlements to land in the long run.
Livestock credit	Same as general credit	Stimulating household based entrepreneurial capability.
Extension services	Training on modern cropping mechanism and livestock rearing mechanism. Provide information regarding product and input market through VO meeting and over telephone and field visiting.	Development of skilled manpower and reduce the information asymmetry.

Source: Impact Assessment of Credit Programme for the Tenant Farmers

Evaluating the impact of the Borga Chashi Unnayan Prokalpo on the social and economic empowerment of Bangladeshi tenant farmers

At BRAC, I was given the freedom to choose between two research topics. I decided to look at the affect that access to agricultural credit has on the social and economic empowerment of female tenant farmers.

Objectives

1. Determine what impact, if any, the BCUP program has over time on the economic situation and stability of female tenant farmers.
2. To assess what impact (if any) enrollment in BCUP has on social empowerment of female tenant farmers.

Research Questions

1. Did BCUP succeed in targeting farmers who have been unable to take loans previously?
2. Has access to BCUP credit given tenant farmers more financial freedom?
 - a. If there have been profits from credit-funded agricultural activities, where is the excess being invested?
3. Has BCUP increased women's involvement in decision making?

Methodology and Limitations

After a literature review on tenancy, agricultural credit, household dynamics, and women's empowerment in Bangladesh, I developed a questionnaire consisting of questions on income, education, farming practices, household dynamics, and feelings about the BCUP program developed. This survey was administered to 13 female and 4 male tenant farmers in Rangpur. Fifth, fourth, third, and second-time borrowers with the BCUP program were interviewed. Interviews were conducted between July 12th and July 17th, 2014 in Rangpur District and lasted about twenty minutes each.

There were several factors that may have inhibited the collection of data. First, I do not speak Bengali. All questions were asked through a translator, and there is no way to assure that they were presented in the same manner every time. The translator also showed some opposition to certain questions and often skipped/rephrased them. Secondly, several BRAC staff members, including the local head officer, were present at interviews. This could have influenced the way respondents answered my questions. It's important to note that no one criticized BRAC or the BCUP program during initial questioning. However, when the BRAC staff member was otherwise occupied, several participants came forward and voiced concerns and problems they had with the program. We did not have time to revisit these as the BRAC staff member returned and the participants stopped sharing. Third, all interviews were collected in a group. In each village, the people we were interviewing would all listen to each other's responses. Often, family members, friends, and other community members would gather around and listen as well. This could have negatively impacted the candidness of answers. Lastly, sample size was extremely small. I only had the opportunity to interview seventeen farmers from one area of the country, and within those interviews the number of participants in each group varied. This has led to my conclusions being drawn based on an extremely limited data set. However, the data collected was sufficient for me to make very basic



Photo: a typical interview set up.

inferences on the program's impact on farmers in Rangpur – but these conclusions should not be taken as an impact assessment of the program as a whole. Rather, they serve as a somewhat qualitative assessment of the BCUP program's impact on these specific seventeen farmers.

Case Studies

Below are the 17 case studies I conducted. Respondents fell into three groups: females who had taken five loans (5), males who had taken five loans (3), females who had taken four loans (2), females who had taken three loans (4), females who had taken two loans (2), and males who had taken two loans (1). This is also the order in which I have presented the profiles.

Five-Time Loan Recipients: Female

Rickta is married and has two sons. She studied until Grade 5. She and her family, including her mother in law, live in a four room tin house. They have 108 decimals of land, 36 of which are rented. They grow corn, potatoes, and rice and sell any surplus. She also has a cow who will soon have two calves. In 2009, she took her first loan from BRAC. Rickta is currently paying off a 20,000 tk loan, which was put towards more land. The loan is in her name, but her husband cosigned and they make joint decisions. Her days are filled with a mix of field work, caring for livestock, and caring for her children. She estimates that she spends 15 days a month doing field work all day, and the other 15 days are spent doing less-intense field work, livestock rearing, household stuff, and recreational activities.

Rickta and her family live in a four room tin house. Healthcare is an occasional expense, as seasonal fevers affect her son. In the last month, they had paid 600 taka for healthcare. They also dedicate money to private tutoring for their son Riad, who is in his fifth year of school. Though they put any surplus income generated by farming activities back into the farm, house, and their children's education, Rickta thinks that more could be done with the surplus. This is something she and her husband will work on for the future.



Nasmin has a husband, one son, and one daughter. They live in a 5 room brick house. Her family owns 72 decimals of land and rents another 72 decimals. Her land is low-lying, so they grow two types of rice and potatoes. They own cattle and chickens. She and her husband decided to get a loan together, and got their first in 2009. Currently, they are paying off a 25,000 tk loan from BRAC's BCUP program. They used this loan to buy a cow and more land, and use the money earned from the cow and land for groceries and school fees to the local government school (about 100 tk/month). Her husband also drives an auto-rickshaw, which brings in about 700 tk a day. Nasmin sells the milk from her cows as well, for about 800 tk per day.

Nasmin takes care of most everything to do with the land and household, while her husband busies himself with the auto-rickshaw business. As such, Nasmin makes most day-to-day household decisions, but she and her husband make major decisions jointly. She feels very confident about her role on the farm and in the household.



Momtaz lives with her two sons and husband in a two room tin house. She's finished class five in school. She and her husband own 48 decimals of land and rent another 48. She has been taking loans for five years, beginning with a 10,000 taka loan and now currently with a 15,000 taka loan. They grow vegetables, rice, corn, and potatoes. She has five chickens, two goats, and two cows. Her husband also drives a rickshaw van, from which he earns 600 taka a day.

The money from the BCUP loan was used for potatoes and pesticides. Surplus goes to pay for her son's education (he is in class 1 at the madrasa) and to the crops and land. Momtaz first heard about the BCUP program, then talked to her husband and then initiated the process together. The loan is in her name, but both signed it. Momtaz and her husband work together in the fields in the morning and evenings when he is not driving, but otherwise Momtaz runs the farm and cares for the livestock and household. Momtaz wants to grow her farm using profits from the loan, and feels very comfortable making the decisions necessary to do that. While in the program, she feels satisfied with what they have accomplished so far, and says there have been no excess problems associated with it



Momtaz lives in a household of six, with her husband, two sons, daughter in law, and 2 month old grandchild. She's been with the BCUP program from its inception in 2009 and has taken five loans. Her most recent is a 20,000 taka loan, and this is also her highest. She has an eighth grade education. She and her husband own 76 decimals, and rents 48 decimals. They own five cattle, three chickens, 22 chicks, and used to have ducks. They grow potatoes, jute, rice, and occasionally other vegetables. Her husband has a side business selling potatoes.

As such, Momtaz makes all farming and household decisions. Her sons help her on the farm, and they also employ other workers during peak times. Her husband hires these workers, but she directs them.

Momtaz spent the loan on buying land, and the money earned from the land goes to the livestock and house. Currently, Momtaz is renovating her house, which will have six rooms with four connected bathrooms, a tin roof, and two balconies. She wishes to complete this renovation by January. Recently, they used money to put insecticide on their fields. Momtaz also has another daughter and grandchild who live nearby. She gives them gifts and toys, and also spends money for educating the child (who is in Class Six). Momtaz also regularly spends money on healthcare, as she has back pain and spends regular money on medicines. She also spent 2,000 taka on her son's healthcare last month.

Momtaz said that she didn't have anything before the BCUP program, and now has a lot. The loans have helped her care for her large family, farm, and house.



Shabana lives with her son, daughter, and husband in a three room tin house. She has finished school up to class five and has had training from the village society on healthcare and legal aid. Her family owns 48 decimals and has rented 52 more. Shabana is a program manager and has been with BCUP for five years, taking a 10,000, 12,000, and three 20,000 taka loans. On her farm, she grows potatoes, rice, corn, and a type of stalk for fuel. She also raised five cows, four chickens, and a few goats.

In addition to farm income, her husband owns a cow selling business, from which he earns 500 taka a week. Shabana also earned 9,000 taka last year from selling milk – a business she manages. Money is managed jointly in her family. Both she and her husband work in the field, employing other laborers during the busiest times. Shabana is in control of day-to-day household occurrences.

The main expenses Shabana and her family face are those related to education. Her daughter is in class seven and her son is in class eight. They spend between two and four thousand taka a month on school fees and private tutoring. There have also been some medical situations that required attention, and 1,000 taka was spent on that last month. Using profits from the loan, she also bought a television and satellite dish.



Overall, Shabana says a lot has changed. Speaking for her village as the manager of the program, she described massive changes to quality of life. All four women now have bathrooms, televisions, and deep tube wells. While their husbands do other work, they run the farm. They know all the technical work necessary for day-to-day operations. Moreover, their knowledge about nutrition has greatly improved. They know about vitamins and that they deserve food and energy. They will not let others go hungry. She and her group is especially proud that they have enough food produced on their farms to feed their families without purchasing things from off the farm. They get fresh meat, eggs, produce, and milk from their own animals and land. New members consistently seek their guidance and Shabana is very proud of what she and the others have been able to accomplish in the program.

Five Year Borrowers: Male

Abu Khalam lives with his wife, son, and daughter-in-law. He also has a daughter who lives with her grandparents. After the Liberation War, Abu finished primary school. He's also had training from CARE on crop management and fisheries. He owns 72 decimals and rents 96 more. He has taken loans from BCUP since 2009, beginning with a 10,000 taka loan and now with a 15,000 taka loan. Abu Khalam grows potatoes and rice, and has two cows and three goats.

Abu and his family live in a one room tin house, but it is quite large and divided into sections for him and his son's families. Although his wife took the loan with him jointly, he insists that it is solely in his name. His wife looks after the cows and house, while he and his sons tend the goats and crops. Abu Khalam makes all decisions, including what to buy for the household. All money goes through him. However, he did recognize his wife for the work she does in his family.

Abu Khalam said that conditions after receiving the loan are much better. He used the money to buy more land. Their only consistent expense is schooling for their children – their daughter is in class 8 and their son at the madrasa. As such, most additional surplus goes back into the farm.



Chan Miah's household consists of four people: himself, and two sons aged 17 and 20. Chan studied up to the SEC level but did not take the exam. He rents 160 decimals and owns 40. He has been in the Borga Chashi program for five years and has taken five 10,000 taka loans in his name, also signed by his wife. They grow potatoes and rice, and have three cows and three goats. Chan makes decisions related to the farm, while his wife runs the household.

The loan money was put toward land, and any money earned beyond what was required for repayments was put towards his house and children's education. Chan is currently building a new, four-room brick house. Both of his sons are in college: one studies at the Model College, while the other studies at the Agricultural Research College. He pays 5,000 taka a month for their education. Recently, his son also had jaundice and so Chan Miah spent 1,000 taka on a clinic and informal healthcare.

Chan is the Program Manager for his village and is the first line of communication between BRAC and the program's clients. He says that he is very proud of being the in BCUP program, and appreciates that its repayment schedule is monthly rather than weekly.



Ashaan Jamaan lives in a household of eleven, including his six brothers, sister, mother, wife, and various children. He has one son (pictured). Ashaan studied to class eight and has received CARE training in fisheries and crop management. Chan owns 150 decimals and rents 18. He has been receiving loans since 2009 (five total) and is currently paying off a 10,000 taka one. He grows rice and potatoes.

Ashaan is the youngest of six sons, but makes all decisions for the farm. He also manages the household's money. His brothers have other trades, but that money does not go to the household. He used the money from the loan to plant a small plot of potatoes, and then used the money earned from that to buy more land. He spends some money on his brick and cement house (metal roof) with four rooms and a balcony. He also occasionally spends money on medicines and doctor's visits for his mom. Ashaan Jamman has been able to comfortably pay off his loans.



Four-Time Borrowers: Female

Albeda lives with her two daughters and husband. She's finished school up to class five and received no further training. Her family owns 48 decimals of land and has rented 60 more. She is currently on her third 15,000 taka BCUP loan and had taken a 10,000 taka loan from BCUP as well. On her land, Albeda grows rice, potato, corn, and jute. She also raises livestock: three cows (one foreign) and five sheep. Her husband works intermittently for law enforcement. If he has consistent work, he makes 5,000 taka a month (600 per day). Albeda also has a business selling milk (1 kg for 30 taka) and keeps the rest at home for her family.

Albeda used previous loans for land and cattle, and has taken the most recent one to build a cushion for future plantings. On the farm, she cares for the cattle and household. Her husband works the fields (and hires workers at busy times). While she is involved in most decisions, her husband is the ultimate decider and gets priority. He also is in control of most spending.

With the profits from the loan, she is building a 3 room brick house. She also pays 170 taka a month for her children's education, and 150 taka a week for medicines. Albeda feels her situation has improved since taking loans, and will stay with the program if she can keep up with repayments.



Hasina lives with her two daughters and husband in a 3 room tin house. She has finished school up to class ten and has received brief training on agricultural techniques. Her family owns 48 decimals and rents 72. She has taken four BCUP loans in her name – 8,000, 15,000, 30,000, and 50,000 taka. On her farm, she grows potatoes, rice jute, and corn and raises 5 cows, ducks, and chickens. Her husband also has an autorickshaw and earns 800 taka a day in additional income.

Hasina initiated the loan process. Her first loans went to the family to rent more land. With the 30,000 taka loan, she bought cattle. She used the 50,000 taka loan to grow potatoes, though she also invested 50,000 taka of her own to the enterprise. Hasina is currently storing these potatoes for future sale in better markets.

Hasina takes care of all farm activities. During the harvests, her husband hires labor but she directs them.

Much like many of the other farmers, Hasina’s main expense is education for her children. Her daughter is in eighth grade, and Hasina “comfortably” pays 3,000 to 4,000 taka a month for her daughter’s transportation to and from school and for private tutoring.



Three-Time Borrowers: Female

Afruzah lives with her mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband, father, son, and daughter in a five room brick house. She studied until primary school and did some schooling in the madrasa. Her family owns 72 decimals and rents another 48. She has taken three loans from BCUP (20,000, 25,000, and 40,000 taka). On their farm, she grows rice, potatoes, jute, vegetables, and corn. She also raises four cows, four goats, ducks and chickens. Her husband and son own a shop and earn 1100 taka a day (30-40% of which is profit). They also earn 60 taka a day from milk selling. The money from the loan went towards cattle and potatoes.

Afruzah’s whole family works in the field, but she directs them.

Her family’s biggest expense is medical care. Her daughter needed to have a 45,000 taka operation, and still needs antibiotics totaling 800 taka a week. She also pays 200 taka a month for each child’s education (her daughter is sitting her JSC, and son is in class six)



Momina lives with her husband and nine year old grandson in a two room tin house. She’s finished school up to grade five. She’s been with the BCUP program for three years and currently is repaying a 20,000 taka loan taken in her name (her husband cosigned). They used the loan to buy land and coconut trees. Her family owns 48 decimals and rents 48 as well. On their farm, she grows potatoes, corn, rice, and vegetables. She also has two cows, five goats, four chickens, and four ducks. Her husband works off the farm as a rickshaw puller and owns an average of 200 taka a day. Like Rickta, she spends about 15 days a month working in the fields exclusively, while the rest are spend doing a mixture of housework, daily farm tasks like caring for livestock, and other activities.

Momina understands the decisions her husband makes and supports him when he takes risks. She takes care of everyday expenses, but larger decisions when it comes to money are made jointly. A consistent expense is her grandson’s education, for which they pay 200 taka a month for him to attend a government school. She and her husband also have a “deep love” for each other and use some money to buy gifts for each other. She feels that the loan program has helped her family come a long way. They are “comfortable” but want to further expand.



Mahmudha lives with her married daughter, two sons, and husband in a two room tin house. She has finished sixth grade. Mahmudha has been in the BCUP program for 3 years and currently is paying off a 23,000 taka loan used to plant potatoes. Her family owns 48 decimals of land and rents 48 more. On this land, they raise rice, corn, jute, and potatoes as well as two cows and five chickens. Her husband has a milk selling business (he buys and sells other people's milk) and earns 800 taka a day.

Mahmudha's situation is somewhat different than most. She is very new to the program and has been extremely ill for the past two years. Over those years, she had to spend 50,000 taka on healthcare and continues to spend 2,000 taka a month on healthcare. As such, most surplus from her land goes there. However, she also must pay 1,600 taka a month for her children's education and quite a bit on her cows. Because of her health difficulties, Mahmudha has seen a little bit of progress from before joining the program, but believes there is potential for much more.



Monzara lives with her youngest daughter (her eldest lives with her grandparents because of their proximity to the madrasa) and her husband in a two room tin house. Monzara has finished school up to class ten. She's also had "lots" of Ansar training in fisheries and crop growth. She owns 48 decimals of land and rents 52 more. Monzara has taken 3 loans from BCUP for 12,000, 15,000, and 23,000 taka. Before receiving credit from BRAC, Monzara took two loans from Grameen Bank. She and her husband took the BCUP loan together after finding out about the program from relatives.

On her land, Monzara grows potatoes, rice, and corn. She also raises livestock – 15 chickens and 6 cows (three mothers, three calves). The money from the loans went toward planting potatoes and buying more land. With the profits, she feels she can save some, but most goes back into farming. Monzara and her husband run the farm jointly, though he spends a decent amount of time off the farm selling milk.

Two of Monzara's cattle are foreign cattle, meaning that they give special milk. Her husband sells this milk, as well as milk collected from other families, for 500 taka a day. One of her cows will also soon have a calf, which she will be able to sell. Daily household costs are covered by the milk money.



However, Monzara also has a lot of expenses. Her foreign cow requires special food, which is "very expensive". She also has been ill and spending 1000-2000 taka a month on medicines. Her daughter was also delivered by caesarian, which was costly. Her eldest daughter is in second grade at the madrasa, for which 600-700 taka a month on school fees and extra private tuition is paid.

Monzara also founded a club with forty women who also went through Ansar training. These women own land collectively and pay 20 taka in savings toward the land every fifteen days. The land is tended as part of a community project. She is very proud of her participation in this program.

After taking a loan, Monzara says her family's position is much better than before.

Two-Time Borrowers: Female

Umma Hani lives with her four year old daughter, husband, mother-in-law's family, and brother-in-law's family. She finished class nine and chose to forgo further training. Her family owns 48 decimals and rents 72 more. Currently, she's paying off her second BCUP loan, which is a 25,000 taka loan. Her husband also works as a handyman/technician for 300 taka a day. On his days off, he works in the field along with Umma and her brother-in-law. They grow rice and potatoes, and keep two cows and five goats.

Umma put the money from her first loan towards the field, and used the second to buy a cow. However, because she has not paid off the loan, she does not consider the cow hers and says she "rents" it. The cow that she bought is pregnant, and thus not giving milk. However, she will soon give birth to a new calf and start giving milk, and will improve the family's finances.

Umma Hani's biggest expenses are her daughter's education (200 taka/month), and medicine (500 taka/month with occasional 500 taka visits to the village doctor).

Umma Hani and her husband make decisions together. They consult each other about money matters. Her mother-in-law and brother-in-law's families do not contribute monetarily (though they help in the fields and household.)

Umma feels like her family is pretty well settled.



Maryam lives with her daughter, son, and husband. She has completed class ten as well as BRAC health training, polio vaccine administration training, and annual refreshers. She owns 48 decimals and rents another 48. On this, she grows rice and potatoes and has two cows. Her husband also has a tailoring shop, where he tailors and employs other workers. She has taken two 10,000 taka loans.

Maryam put the first 10,000 taka loan towards the farm, and the second towards her daughter's education. Her daughter is in higher secondary school and her son in kindergarten. Together, she spends 4,000 taka a month on education. She puts any surplus beyond what is spent on the farm and on education towards her home, which is a three room tin house. Recently, she bought chairs, another bed (they have two now), and a television. She and her husband make decisions together, but Maryam is responsible for day-to-day operations on the farm. She feels very confident in her work and proud of what she has accomplished.



Two-Time Borrowers: Male

Manik's family is just him and his wife living in a three room tin house. He owns 24 decimals and rents 120 more. He studied at a BRAC school until grade five. He has taken two loans from BCUP, a 10,000 taka one and his current 12,000 taka one. His family grows potatoes and rice, and owns one cow and three goats.

Manik Miah handles the money and farm, and his wife runs the household. Money from the loan is spent on the land and any excess is saved. Due to his small family, Manik has very few expenses and has been able to save quite a lot.



While conducting cases studies, I was constantly astounded by the generosity of the tenant farmers I interviewed. Time and time again, I was invited into their homes for tea, despite it being Ramadan. I was, however, fasting and thus declined. Then, I was told to come back some other day. Not only did the farmers offer their food, but they offered their time. I am extremely grateful for their willingness to share their stories and time with me.

Analysis and Conclusions: BCUP and Economic Empowerment

Has BCUP successfully targeted farmers who were unable to take loans previously?

Of the seventeen farmers surveyed, only one (5.8%) reported having received institutional credit before enrollment in BCUP (she had taken two loans from Grameen Bank). This supports the research that reports tenant farmers being excluded from formal credit markets. 94.1% of farmers surveyed did not take a loan from an institution (defined as bank or NGO) before enrolling in Borga Chashi Unnayan Prokalpo.

Has enrollment in the BCUP program increased tenant farmer's economic stability and empowerment?

One marker of increased economic stability and empowerment is land ownership. Owning one's own land allows the farmer more control over his or her finances. In Bangladesh, there are several types of tenancy: sharecropping, in which the harvest is shared between tenant and landowner; fixed seasonal rent; khai-khalasi, in which the farmer pays a fixed amount of advanced rent for a specified number of years and the lease expires when the landowner pays back the lease money; land on mortgage; and a lease arrangement. No matter which type of tenancy system a farmer participates in, he or she is indebted or beholden to their landlord. Because the relatively large landowners own the majority of property, they can set the rent. There is always an element of uncertainty to tenancy.

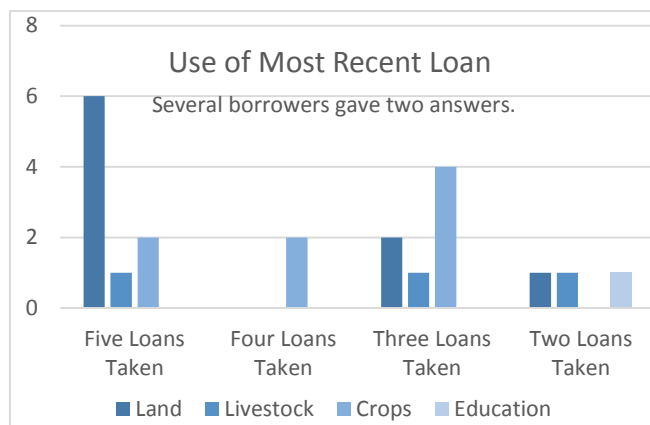
Thus, owning one's own land is an important step towards economic empowerment. Any profits from agriculture can go directly back to the farmer and the land, without first going to a landlord.

Average Number of Decimals Operated by Farmer

<i>Five Loans Taken</i>	<i>Four Loans Taken</i>	<i>Three Loans Taken</i>	<i>Two Loans Taken</i>
138.5	114	103	120*

**this mean includes the outlier of 168 decimals*

While farmers might not necessarily own more of the land they operate, time spent in program correlates to more land operated. As operation size increases, the potential for profits does as well. More surplus money means more financial freedom. A profitable enterprise allows farmers to focus on long-term goals rather than short term necessities when borrowing. Evidence of this is available when examining how borrowers from the various groups applied their loans.



Of the five year borrowers, 75% indicated that buying more land was one or all of their reasons for taking a loan. I will exclude the data from four-and-two year borrowers, because the sample size was too small to draw any conclusions. However, among third-time borrowers, 50% reported that some of their loan went towards land, while a full 100% dedicated some of the credit towards crops. Fifth-year credit recipients seem to have become economically stable

enough to buy more land – which is a long-term investment – rather than focus on the relatively short-term investment into crops. They are successful enough that they generate sufficient working capital without the help of credit to sustain their cropping. Not only does buying land require a large up-front injection of money, it also will present a continuing financial commitment as seeds, fertilizer, and potentially labor will need to be purchased in larger quantities. The decision to purchase and operate more land demonstrates that five-year BCUP members are confident in their continued financial stability. This self-sufficiency is a sign that BCUP is empowering farmers economically over time.

The Borga Chashi program targets functionally landless (owning under 50 decimels), marginal (owning up to 149 decimels), and small farmers (only those owning 200 decimels and below are eligible). If we view land ownership as a mark of economic empowerment, then the BCUP program is indeed empowering farmers.

Land Ownership Status of Five-Time Borrowers

<i>Functionally Landless</i>	<i>Within 2 Decimels of Marginal</i>	<i>Marginal Landowner</i>	<i>Small Landowner</i>
1	2	4	1

Total number of respondents in group: 8

Land Ownership Status of Four-Time Borrowers

<i>Functionally Landless</i>	<i>Within 2 Decimels of Marginal</i>	<i>Marginal Landowner</i>	<i>Small Landowner</i>
0	2	0	0

Total number of respondents in group: 2

Land Ownership Status of Three-Time Borrowers

<i>Functionally Landless</i>	<i>Within 2 Decimels of Marginal</i>	<i>Marginal Landowner</i>	<i>Small Landowner</i>
0	3	1	0

Total number of respondents in group: 4

Land ownership Status of Two-Time Borrowers

<i>Functionally Landless</i>	<i>Within 2 Decimels of Marginal</i>	<i>Marginal Landowner</i>	<i>Small Landowner</i>
1	2	0	0

Number of Respondents in group: 3

As shown by these charts, five of the eight five-time borrowers have escaped functional landlessness. Four have become marginal landowners. Ashaan Jamaan, owning 150 decimels, has even attained “small landowner” status. Only Chan Miah is functionally landless (with 40 decimels, he is 10 decimels away from marginal), but he operates one of the biggest farms (200 decimels) of all the farmers I interviewed. There is one other farmer (Afruzah, in the three-time borrower group) who has become a marginal farmer, but overwhelmingly, members of the other three categories are technically functionally landless, but within two decimels of becoming marginal. I do not think that it is a coincidence that the most senior members of the BCUP program have both the most land and the priority of using the credit they receive for buying land. BCUP has empowered tenant farmers to become owners and control their own land, thus ensuring a more stable economic future.

BCUP and Social Empowerment

"Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family." - Kofi Annan

As Kofi Annan so eloquently put it, education is crucial to empowerment. It is essential to progress, and this is absolutely true with regards to tenant farmers enrolled in the Borga Chashi program.

Along with credit, BCUP offers agricultural extension services through the Village Organizations. These extension services fill a need, as there had been no consistent access to training programs among farmers surveyed before BCUP.

BCUP Participants' Access to Training

<i>Completed Training Course</i>	<i>Some Training</i>	<i>No Training</i>
5	1	11

Of the farmers who reported receiving training, four had received training in more than one area. These dual responses are included in the data below.

Training Subjects

<i>Agricultural Techniques</i>	<i>Fisheries</i>	<i>Healthcare</i>	<i>Legal Aid</i>
4	3	2	1

Only four out of seventeen (5.19%) of farmers surveyed received training in agricultural techniques before enrolling in BCUP. In a world where technology is improving and new methods are developed every year, adoption and use of new techniques is crucial to increasing productivity.

Now, every tenant farmer receiving credit from BCUP has access to an extension officer who will advise them and teach them about new farming practices. During interviews, several farmers mentioned that their Program Officers were always available if they had questions or problems with their crops. This technical training will allow farmers to increase production, adopt relevant techniques, and practice sustainable farming. It also stands to reason that recipients of BCUP's extension services will be able to pass on what they have learned to community members, further improving farming practices across their area. In one interview, the group of women began to explain the difference access to these extension services has made. They described how they now know all the technical requirements for farming, and can, as women, operate a farm. Before, they didn't have the technical knowledge to run their farms without assistance. However, BCUP training has changed all of that. They've also begun understanding how crucial good nutrition is, and take pride in being completely self-sufficient in their food supply.

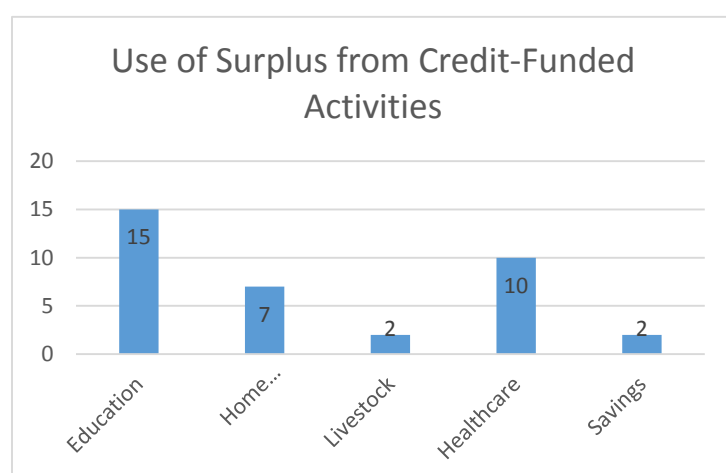
Beyond the technical training provided by BRAC, recipients of BCUP credit seemed to place a high importance on education. In Bangladesh, the national average for years of education completed was 4.8. Among tenant farmers, this dropped to 3 years (Impact Assessment).

Table: Years of Education Completed

<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
6.5	7

Female: 13 farmers; Male: 4 farmers

In the villages I surveyed, the mean for years spent in school for both men and women was above both the national average and the average for tenant farmers. However, no farmer sat the SEC exam, and none attended school higher than secondary. Despite having very little higher education (most only studied to primary school), every school-age child in the households surveyed was enrolled in school. Farmers overwhelmingly listed education as the priority designation of credit-funded profits.



All but two listed education as one target for their money, and both who did not list it had no school-age children or grandchildren. Clearly, farmers enrolled in BCUP see their child's education as a priority. Moreover, BCUP seems to be an enabler of education. Without the money earned from credit-funded activities, there is a chance that families wouldn't be able to contribute as much towards their child's education, or that money would

be spent at the cost of other spending. With the BCUP program, it is evident that families are able to fund education without hardship. If BCUP didn't exist, it isn't farfetched to assume that the education of one child might be sacrificed for that of another. Instead, credit-funded surplus is

keeping children in school. Education is an important marker of development. It empowers its recipients, and the focus on education is an indicator of social empowerment among BCUP participants.

The second most frequent use of surplus income generated by credit-funded activities was healthcare. For many families interviewed, healthcare was a consistent monthly expense. In the case of Afruzah and Mahmudha, who had to spend 45,000 and 50,000 taka plus 1000 to 2000 taka a week for healthcare, it is their largest expense. Without the increased income generated by BCUP credit, it is not unreasonable to infer that paying for these treatments would have been a considerable financial burden. It may have resulted in the sale of a cow (which would have eliminated future earnings from milk sales, the security of the animal as a food source, and an important asset), the removal of a child from school, or a loan from an informal source (potentially indebting the family for a significant amount of time.) However, the credit provided by BCUP allows farmers to engage in profitable enterprises, making it possible for them to have enough money to make paying for healthcare less of a burden.

In an interesting intersection of economic and social empowerment, BCUP is increasing the autonomy of women enrolled in the program while simultaneously improving their financial stability. One of the reasons BCUP was extended to women in 2012 was because it was found that they were the farm managers while their husbands were mainly employed in rural non-farm activities. This was echoed by my research. From potato-reseller to police officer to store owner to autorickshaw driver, men were employed off the farm when their wife had taken the credit. The money earned from these additional economic activities ranged from 200 taka per day to 1100 taka a day. Moreover, many women also had their own enterprises – selling milk was common. The money earned from these activities often went right into the household's daily operating expenses, leaving the money earned after harvest for larger projects (like household improvements). The female borrowers ran the day-to-day farm operations, and their husbands helped when they were not working in their other businesses. Often, the women had control over all farm decisions, even directing hired workers. As the years spent enrolled in BCUP increased, their authority in their families did as well. When men were the primary borrowers, their wives did not manage the farms. Rather, they ran the household. As farm managers, the husbands had no additional non-farm jobs. This means that household income was decreased. It is safe to conclude that borrowing from BCUP empowers women socially, and their families economically by allowing for participation in non-farm enterprises.

In conclusion, BCUP does indeed improve the social and economic empowerment of female tenant farmers. It is also empowering the next generation, as its participants have been using surplus generated from credit-funded activities to send children to school. Without BCUP credit, household finances would be negatively impacted, and women's household authority decreased.

Reflection

When I left the airport in Dhaka, my glasses fogged. I took my first steps in my new city blindly, my vision obscured by the humidity that now seems normal. The first week – month, even – was a blur of sights (there was a man with ten live chickens on his head!), sounds (five times a day, the

adhan echoed through this city of mosques), smells (vendors fried jalebi in the street), tastes (the word *jhaal* means spicy, and became synonymous with *pain*), and sensations (the gritty texture of the sidewalks felt foreign beneath my feet). I wore my first *shalwar kameez*, adding my bright colors to the rainbow of women on the streets. *Bishi, bishi* – too much – I pled, desperately attempting to negotiate prices in my halting Bangla before giving in to the stern-faced vendor. In Dhaka, I was a perpetual outsider. My life in small town Minnesota did nothing to prepare me for the overwhelming experience of living in a city where the buildings stretched farther than my field of vision and held more people than lived in my entire state.

Despite this, I found shared experiences everywhere. To Monara, a tenant farmer I interviewed in rural Bangladesh, my upbringing on a farm made me her *apu* – sister. A mutual love for Harry Potter transformed Boshudha, my colleague, into my friend. My mentor, development economist Dr. Mahabub Hossain, employed the same research techniques I learned as a lab assistant at UW-Stout. Gradually, I've realized that Bangladesh is a lot like home.

In this city of sixteen million, I'm nearly invisible; nevertheless, I've found my place here. I'll never be an effective bargainer. I probably won't be able to consume foods with the word *jhaal* in the name without crying, yet I feel content. I've carved out my own place, a small place, where what I do matters. It's a space where I have a name. It is me saying "*Aami goru bhalo bashi*" – I love cows – to Afruzah, a farmer, and seeing her chuckle in amusement. It is eating mango ice cream with my friend. It is waking up for *sehri*, the meal before a day of fasting, and being greeted with smiles at three in the morning. This is my Bangladesh.

When I stepped off that plane, I had no idea how deeply I would grow to care for Bangladesh. I have made lifelong friends. I have done crazy things. However, I think I do know what the most incredible part of this internship was: I get it. I finally get it.

In German, when you are hungry, you say "Ich habe Hunger." Literally, "I have hunger." I always thought of this as somewhat of a silly thing to say – after all, how does one possess hunger? How is hunger a noun? It sounded like a disease. "Hungry" made much more sense to me – a description of a state of being.

Bangladesh has taught me the difference between hunger and hungry.

Hungry is when you haven't eaten for three hours because you can't be bothered to find food. Hunger is when you haven't eaten for three days because there is no food. Hungry is when you skipped lunch and your stomach rumbles. Hunger is a mother skipping lunch, and dinner, and breakfast, because there isn't enough for her and her child. But still, he has empty eyes and craters between his ribs. Hungry is a stubborn child who won't eat the food her mom cooked for her and was sent to bed early. Hunger is a child whose mother has no food to cook for her, nor a bed to be sent to.

Hungry can be solved by a trip to the refrigerator.

Hunger is a lot more complicated.

I saw hunger for the first time in Bangladesh. Poverty had a face, and it was the wide-eyed child staring at me in the street. Food insecurity had a name, and it was Monara. But in Bangladesh, I also saw hope. I saw progress. Every magenta BRAC logo was a glimmer of promise. I saw motivation, and I met dedication. I glimpsed the future every day when I went into work and greeted my coworkers. I encountered change when I sat and interviewed the tenant farmers. Every time I grew discouraged at the scope of the problem, I would look outside and see BRAC's operations in the Korail slum. Every day, people are being pulled out of poverty. The battle is not won, not even close, but this is a war of attrition.

Bangladesh has taught me a lot, but nothing is more important than this: we can do it. BRAC expanded from one man's vision into the largest NGO in the world. If this is what one man could create, imagine if we all worked towards ending poverty and food insecurity. Far from discouraging me, my time in Bangladesh has given me conviction. I know what I want to do now. For the first time, I am absolutely certain of what I want to do, and that is to fight food insecurity and poverty. I enter senior year with new direction. My summer in Bangladesh has come to an end, but it also marks a beginning. And for that, I am so grateful.

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