



From Salty Soil to Green Fields:

The Story of Alpona... The Woman Who Tamed the Storm and Became its Symbol

“Our rural life is made up of trees, soil, water, birds, cattle, everything. Here, one cannot just think about oneself, one must think about everyone. This is the lesson I have learned from my village. From BARCIK, I have gained self-confidence and learned how to work well with the many resources that we, the poor, possess. I am doing well now, and seeing me, many women in the village are learning to live in this way. My husband has left day labor and now works with me in farming. I have come to understand that people must take responsibility for their own change and discover their own strength.”



With these words, of **Alpona Rani Mistri (45)** began sharing her story-the story of a woman born into a poor family in Dhumghat in Iswaripur Union of Shyamnagar Upazila, Satkhira District, one of the most salinity affected areas in Bangladesh. Married at a young age, carried simple dreams of a peaceful and stable life.

But life had other plans. Shortly after her marriage, her husband lost the land he had inherited from his family. With that loss, the responsibility of feeding his family of four became a heavy burden, especially with little financial security, as her husband had no steady work and moved from one temporary, daily-wage job to another.

Still, Alpona refused to give up. She believed that innovation could take root even in the harshest conditions. She began growing vegetables in their small garden, while also working in paddy fields under a sharecropping system, determined to make even a small difference in her family's life.

Then 2009 came, bringing another devastating blow. Cyclone Aila struck their area, destroying their home and possessions, and flooding their 33-decimal homestead land (about 0.33 acres) with salty water. The loss was immense, yet Alpona's hope remained unshaken. Despite the scarcity of local seeds and organic materials at the time, she started again planting vegetables and striving to restore life to her salt-damaged soil.



Her journey was far from easy, but her determination led her, in 2012, to the agro-biodiversity fair organized by **BARCIK**. There, she became part of the **Cultivating Change** program, which connected her with a supportive community of farmers. They guided her in accessing seeds and taught her organic farming techniques. Equipped with this knowledge, she developed a well-planned cultivation strategy, a turning point that transformed her life and made her a shining example of resilience and the human capacity to rise above adversity.

Alpona's journey has been filled with learning and innovation, but above all, it has been a journey of a heart that refuses to let go of hope. She tirelessly searches for climate-resilient crops, grows vegetables organically, raises livestock, and surrounds her home with trees that offer shade, fruits, and healing. She produces organic compost and plant-based pesticides, sharing them generously with fellow farmers.

Her creativity goes beyond the agriculture, she was the first to introduce energy-efficient handlooms to her village, earning it the name "Eco-friendly Weaving Village" with a compassionate heart, she also practices traditional medicine, offering free primary healthcare to those in need.

Alpona has received national and regional recognition, including the National Agriculture Award and the National Women's Award.

She founded the “**Women Change Makers**” group in her village and trains others in the Ministry of Agriculture’s organic farming programs.

She rejects hybrid seeds and chemical inputs, firmly believed that local seeds and traditional techniques carry within them the promise of future generation.

Today, Alpona challenges the mode of commercial chemical agriculture, walking alongside rural



families on their path expanding organic farming.

She has become a symbol of hope. With intelligence and perseverance, she managed to secure a steady income for herself and her family.

A voice from heart of the land reminds us that courage, knowledge, and love can bring life even to the most fragile soil.

IN the end, Alpona proved that women can lead change, break barriers, and inspire entire communities. As the local government and administration welcome her voice at the decision-making table, and national media celebrate her as a shining icon of sustainable farming in Bangladesh.

BARCIK Bangladesh: A non-governmental non-profit development organization working with indigenous people in Bangladesh, and a partner of Cultivating Change.

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