

# Farming brings pride and transformation

**In Bangladesh, roughly 16 million people are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, and these are often some of the poorest and most marginalised communities.**

Christian Aid's partner Shushilan is working with some of the most vulnerable farming communities in the south of the country. They have organised a farmers' group called 'Shushamay' to help small-scale and marginalised farmers, especially women, to get training and become more resilient to climate change.

## **Shushamay**

Shushamay community members have received training on cultivating rice, fish farming, homestead gardening, using energy efficient stoves or 'chulas' and how to manage during disasters like floods. This training has given farmers more confidence in their farming techniques and many have tried new initiatives which have brought extra income for their family.

Shushamay committee members have also started a savings scheme to build self-reliance and to help the community



Sharma uses all the techniques that she has learned from Shushilan to help her grow enough for her family.



Sharma Rani's confidence has grown enough that she offers advice to others in the village.

when there are natural disasters. They also organise an annual farmers' conference to get people together to share experiences and ideas. Women have worked together to gain self-confidence in their ability to earn money for their family.

### **Sharma Rani**

Sharma Rani Mondal is a mother of three daughters and one son. Prior to receiving training from Shushilan, Sharma's husband used to venture into the Sunderbans – a vast mangrove forest shared by Bangladesh and India that is home to the Bengal tiger. At that time they had no regular source of income and relied on whatever fish or wood he could find on his trips, which sometimes lasted up to a week, to the Sunderbans.

Today, Sharma doesn't have to worry about her husband going into the forest. She is now growing salt-resilient rice on the land she leases from a nearby Hindu

## **'I am so proud of my mother being a farmer'**

temple. Sharma and her husband tend their paddy together and they now have a secure source of income, for now and the years to come but it doesn't stop Sharma, who has hopes to expand her land, from worrying about salinity, cyclones and tiger attacks.

With the increasing change in climate, Sharma wants to diversify the types of crops she grows because she's not sure what will happen in the future. That way, if one fails she can still earn income from the others.

### **Sharing the knowledge**

Sharma is now sharing the knowledge she gained from her training with Shushilan by helping others in the village to learn new agricultural techniques. Sharma said: 'Now I teach people ways to get higher production in their farming. Their admiration makes me more valued as a farmer in the village and increases my self-worth too.'

Sharma's daughter Sabita, 11, is very proud of her mother: 'I am so proud of my mother being a farmer. When other villagers come to my mother for suggestions regarding agriculture it gives me enormous pleasure.'

As well as the knowledge gained from her training, Sharma is a member of the Shushamay farmers' group. The group meets every month to share information, ideas and solutions to the agricultural challenges they face due to the harsh environment they live in.

## **Challenges in Satkhira, Bangladesh**

Satkhira is a district in southwestern Bangladesh. The region was severely affected by Cyclone Aila in 2009, which left many people displaced. The region also struggles

with drought, floods and salinity, which makes it difficult for people to source fresh water for drinking and growing crops. Because of the region's vulnerability,

Christian Aid partner Shushilan is helping to empower some of the most vulnerable people by supporting local groups of farmers with training and small business loans.