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Sonia: A new leader for women entrepreneurship development at remote

 Sonia is an good example of Local Service Provider (LSP), under the European Union funded Leadership to Ensure Adequate Nutrition (LEAN) project. There are more significant examples like Sonia in Chittagong Hill Tracts, those who have benefited from LEAN project. Sonia is one of the proactive LSP who created massive changes in community based agro-farming and local women entrepreneurship in her surroundings.

She belongs to Mro community from Amtoli para of Thanchi Upazila under Bandarban Hill District. She acquired traditional knowledge on agro-farming from her parents. After her marriage, she shifted to in law's house. There she faced financial difficulties while running a large family. To overcome this crisis, Sonia started agro-farming in a small piece of land adjacent to their house. Her mother in law helped her in this regard. Gradually she extended farming. After selling vegetables, some of her economic problem resolved. Knowing about Sonia, LEAN project staff contacted her.

In 2019, LEAN project staff began community sessions in Sonia's area. Because of her diligence LEAN project select her as an important Local Service Provider (LSP) for her community. LEAN project trained her on how to be a good and proactive LSP. After that she became a facilitator. Sonia received skills development trainings on specific production techniques for selected vegetables. These training was facilitated in jointly with the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE). The training also included preserving seedlings of vegetable crops, vermicomposting, building low-cost drip irrigation systems, integrated pest management (IPM) techniques. Pheromone traps, and moringa production has been added to the training.

After trainings, Sonia established a demonstration plot for Low Cost Drip Irrigation in her community

by using abandoned plastic bottles. She incorporated new practices with her traditional techniques which she learned from her parents. Vermicompost and pheromone traps, which she learned from training, reduced her usage of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Sonia established demonstration plots on the improved production techniques for broccoli, bitter melon, chili, and spinach. From these demonstrations plots she grew and sold over 715kg Broccoli & Spinach on 30 decimals of land, earning BDT 22,500 with enough leftovers to feed her family. She invested 8,000 BDT of these earnings while setting aside BDT 14,500 in her savings account.

By recruiting other farmers in her community, Sonia has formed four producer groups with 39 members. With the help of LEAN project, by organizing technical session and demonstration she spread her experience in community. Part of this includes facilitating matchmaking sessions with the support of LEAN to create linkages with local suppliers and market.

Sonia enlisted as a seed vendor for A.R. Malik seed, began an irrigation and IPM installation service, and acquired a valid trade license so that she can create new enterprise opportunities from her community training activities. Since beginning this venture, Sonia has earned BDT 5,000 in profit by selling tomato, gourd, and cucumber seeds, BDT 1,500 from installing irrigation systems during the dry season and BDT 1,200 from selling pheromone traps to fellow producers.

His triumph does not stop here. Her thoughts are more far-reaching. She plans for next year. Increase the number of producers group, expand business, adopting new technologies, more engagement with DAE and private sector are in her plans. With the help of LEAN project she became an icon for the people of her community.

