



## Access to Financial Assets Improves Income and Nutrition in Bandarban, Bangladesh

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a remote, mountainous region in south-eastern Bangladesh, families from a dozen distinct ethnic groups must strategize their daily survival. The Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience, and Gender Equity (SAPLING) program, a USAID-funded development food security activity designed to improve gender-equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience in Bandarban District, combines income generating activities (IGAs) with member-run Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC), bridging opportunities to earn income, access financial services, increase assets, and gain skills in business and financial planning.

Based on its previous success, SAPLING increased the number of community-based SILC groups from 352 to 815 groups in fiscal year 2019, encouraging IGA participants and people living in remote communities, to become members. As of September 2019, SAPLING has engaged 12,814 participants in SILC groups, of which 4,354 are also members of SAPLING's IGA program, providing access to needed financial resources to scale up production, and recover from disaster.



SILC meeting in action. Photo credit: Mazharul Islam, SILC Manager

Maprueching Marma of Dulang Para, Ruposhi Para Union, Lama Upazila, is a 26-year-old wife and mother of two sons, ages 8 and 1, whose family struggled to make ends meet as poor farmers. In April 2018, Maprueching became a member of a papaya IGA group, learning business planning, marketing and sales strategies to initiate a profitable papaya production business.

In July 2018, Maprueching and 24 other community members (including seven IGA participants) formed the Dulang Para SILC group and subsequently completed a 9-module training to successfully self-manage the group. The group agreed to meet twice a month, deposit BDT 20 (\$0.24) at each meeting, and establish a fixed monthly interest rate for loans. As a safety net for members, the group also funded an interest free "Emergency Fund" of BDT 1,000.00 (approx. \$12) to help members in times of need. To date, Dulang Para SILC group has saved BDT 37,500 (\$433), including interest.

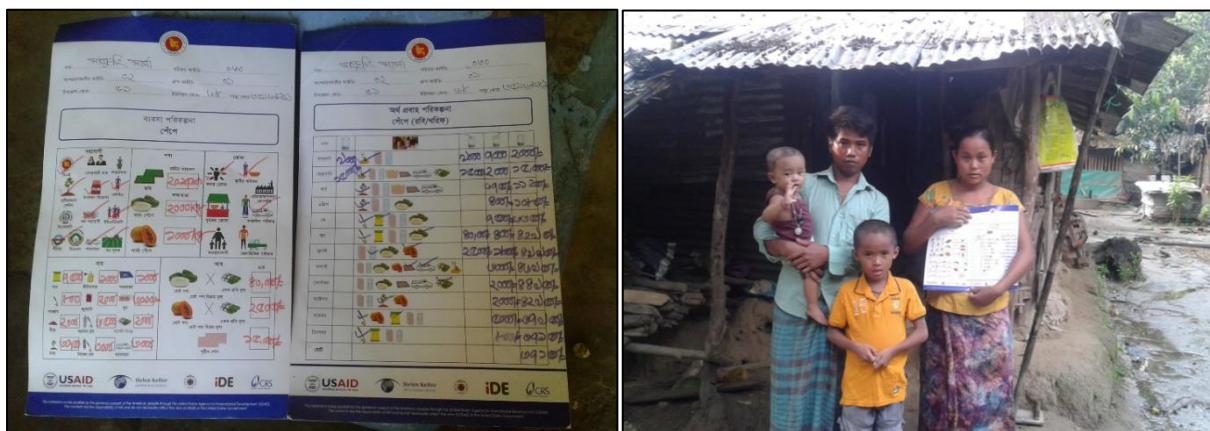


Maprueching Marma, her husband, and two sons stand among her papaya business, started with loans from the member-run SAPLING SILC group and successful application of business planning and production skills learned through SAPLING. Photo credit: Hasina Begum, SILC Agent, Lama

Since starting her papaya business, Maprueching has earned BDT 11,700 (\$139) and expects to earn another BDT 3,500 (\$41) at the upcoming harvest. Joining the SILC group has enabled Maprueching to use her new business and financial planning skills to dream bigger than she thought was possible. She has taken and repaid three loans to invest in agricultural production, making a profit each time and

expanding her business to include vegetables. Like many families in the CHT, Maprueching's papaya and vegetable gardens were damaged in devastating floods and landslides in July 2019. To recover, she took a BDT 4,000 (\$47) loan from her SILC group to purchase new seedlings and other inputs.

In her current business plan, Maprueching estimates she needs BDT 15,000 (\$178) for expansion and plans to borrow that from the SILC group. She and her husband believe that having access to low-interest, member-run savings and loans through SILC has contributed greatly to their current success.



**Left:** Business plan of Maprueching Marma. **Right:** Maprueching Marma, her husband, and two sons in front of their home in Dulang Para, Ruposhi Para Union, Lama Upazilla, Bandarban. She is holding her IGA business plan. Photo credit: Hasina Begum, SILC Agent, Lama