

Gold Star: A Successful Network of Women Entrepreneurs

SMC is implementing community mobilization program in 153 upazilas of 64 districts of Bangladesh through four partner NGOs. One of the key components of the community mobilization program is to create women entrepreneurs. These women, branded as Gold Star Member (GSM), are selected through a process by using a set of standard criteria to sustain their efforts. This network has been established to create demand in the community for essential public health products by delivering necessary health messages as well as to earn money by selling products to households. The health messages cover healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy, first 1000 days of care, adolescent health, nutrition, health and hygiene, etc.

SMC does not pay any remuneration to these women for their engagement in the business but provides training and mentoring support to develop them as entrepreneurs. The training covers information on different public health issues, product detailing and promotion, selling and business techniques, pricing, profit calculation, roles and responsibilities of GSM, communication techniques, etc. These GSMs receive different behavior change communication and promotional materials to create demand in the community. They also receive a booklet focusing on product details as a reference guide for them.



GSMs have gathered in a monthly meeting

The catchment area for a GSM covers about 1,000 to 1,200 households or even more, subject to mobility and accessibility. It allows a GSM to explore business potentials in a large and targeted market to earn a fair income through sales. The GSMs usually visit households to create demand and sell public health products in the community. In addition, they assist project staff in organizing courtyard meetings, pregnancy care services, growth monitoring sessions, adolescent health sessions and MoniBiscuit shasthya sheba campaign in their catchment areas where they attend to make the product available for the participants. The GSMs also refer potential clients for long-acting and permanent methods to the nearest service delivery center.

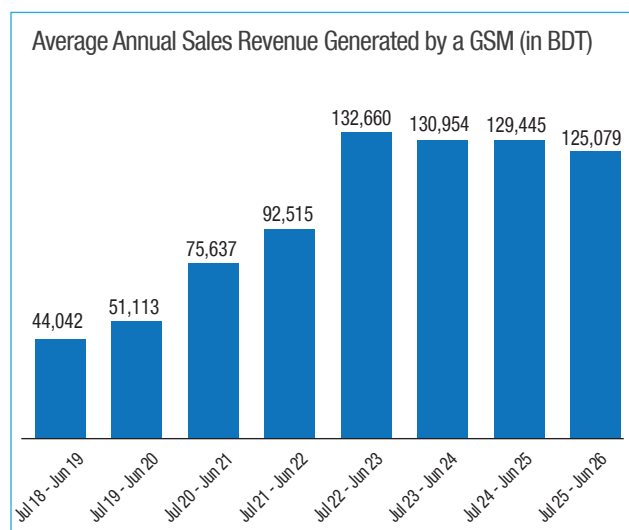
Story of Gold Star Provider, Ms. Shaheda Begum

Ms. Shaheda Begum, is one of the promising GSMs at Nagarkanda Upazila under Faridpur district, joined the GSM network in 2017. Entering a new horizon of social marketing, she learned how to disseminate health messages and sell public health products in the community. In the first month, she



found the business profitable. Currently, her monthly sale is Tk. 62,000 with a profit margin of Tk. 16,000-17,000. Talking about her position in her family and community, she says, "I enjoy my work and I receive cordial support from my husband and in-laws to continue my business. My husband and I jointly decide our family matters relating to the child's health care and education, which I was unable to do before. I love to serve the community and achieve further success in my business by expanding my product basket with SMC public health products and thereby become a role model in the community to inspire other women to join us in this initiative."

Starting in 2013, at present, approximately 4,500 women are working as entrepreneurs under the Gold Star network. The average sales of a GSM in March 2026 is Tk.10,062. It has been observed that making public health products available at the household level through GSM can significantly contribute to increased access to and utilization of public health products, especially in rural areas. The following figure shows the annual sales of a GSM during the last five years.



The women entrepreneurship initiative of SMC has made a significant change in the lives of rural women. It increases their ability to participate in the decision-making process at families and communities. A recent study reveals that 43% of GSMs believe they receive social recognition in terms of respect and acceptance in their families and communities due to their engagement with the GSM network that helps surpass their boundary from family to the



GSM is conducting a courtyard session

larger community (Assessing the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of Gold Star Network, 2019). The GSMs informed that the awareness-building activities by them in the community are well accepted by the community because women feel comfortable approaching them for purchasing female health products at their doorstep. This is encouraging that a total of 57 GSMs have been elected as members in the recent local government election. Thus this initiative has also empowered those women.



GSM is carrying SMC health products for sale

SMC is expanding the Gold Star model each year due to ensure accessibility and also to meet the demand for information and products in the community. Based on the experience of rural Gold Star model and meeting the demand of the urban population, SMC started implementing the Gold Star model in the urban setting from January 2021. Currently, 252 GSMs are working in the peri-urban areas of Dhaka, Chattogram, Cumilla, Barishal, Mymensingh and Rajshahi City Corporation areas. SMC is in the phase of expanding this initiative in other areas of Bangladesh.



GSM is selling products at household

For more information

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