

A deaf-mute dream

Life has always been challenging for Abdur Rashid and his family. Rashid and his wife have a deaf-mute daughter Kulsum, aged about 20 years and two sons aged 17 and 11 years respectively. They live in a village named Patharia, under Chandigarh union in Durgapur Upazila, Netrokona. They have a tiny little tin-shaded house with an unhygienic latrine in the back on a small piece of land in the village. Rashid, his wife, and two sons work as a day laborer. They try to find any job as low skill support from paddy field to fish farm. The daughter, Kulshum Khatun stays at home and cooks for the family. The income they generate is never enough for the family. Their regular meals contain rice, some locally available vegetables, and lentils. Sometimes they buy fish which is very expensive for them. Their poor health condition strongly reflects that this food fails to provide nutritional balance. *“The common food we can afford is rice and some vegetables in most of the day. Sometimes we buy some fish and lentils which is not more than two-four times in a month”*, Rashid mentioned.



Until 2014, this was the chronicle of the family. But in late 2014, a bolt from the blue came to Rashid and his family when their only daughter Kulsum, who is a deaf-mute by born was raped by a powerful neighbor and got pregnant. Like so many other countries, in Bangladesh too, being raped is considered as a curse and the victim and the family have to go through a series of social crisis during the post-incident period. Nothing exception happened to Kulshum and her family. They filed a case in the local police station against the rapist and wanted justice for this crime but unfortunately could not avail justice from the court as the accused man and his family is socially powerful and spent a lot of money to manipulate the entire process. Abdur Rashid is a poor day laborer and struggles to manage the daily needs was unable to spend extra money for the case which leads them to delay the process and after a certain time, the case was delayed

and so does the justice. By next year, Kulshum gave birth of a baby girl who is two years old now.

Being raped and giving birth of an unwanted child has brought enormous sufferings for the family. Poverty along with social exploitation, injustice, pressure from the accused family is threatening their existence. *“I can't sleep sound as the nightmare always thrives towards an uncertain future. My daughter is exposed to threats as she stays home alone all day long and the house we live is not protected”* Abdur Rashid



quoted.

The house they live in is made of mud wall and tin-shed. It's too dark inside and sunlight and enough fresh air can't enter the house which forces them to live in a damp and unhealthy environment. Moreover, they also have to accommodate their only cattle inside the house which makes the environment even beetle. They have no tube-well of their own and she has to collect drinking water from far. They use nearby pond water for washing, bathing and other purposes.

A better shelter can certainly make a huge difference in their lives and can offer them a safe and healthy living. A new home will ensure enough space for everyone and most importantly ensure their safety in any situation including the natural disasters like heavy rainfall, excessive heat and cyclone.

"I am excited to hear that Habitat Bangladesh will provide us a new house. It will be a great support to have a new house and a sanitary latrine. We will not have to think about our safety, especially our daughter and her kid when we are away from home. Nevertheless, this will certainly improve our living standard and status of our family. This will also save a lot of money which we have to spend now to keep the existing home livable" Khudeza Begum, Kulshum's mother quoted.



Kulshum's parents shared the good news with her in sign language which brought a beautiful smile on her face. It looked like the flow of happiness from her heart glowing on her face.

"We have no demand as we already know that our life is full of losses. All we want now to have a safe and strong house where we have the least security, peace and a better life", Abdur Rashid, Kulshum's father added.