



2018 AWARD Fellow  
**Bisakha Dewan**

<b>Position</b>	Assistant Professor, Agribusiness and Marketing
<b>Institution</b>	Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University (SAU), Dhaka
<b>Country</b>	Bangladesh
<b>MSc</b>	Agribusiness and Marketing, SAU, 2013
<b>Mentor</b>	Dr. Mohammed Mizanul Haque Kazal, Professor and Chairman, Development and Poverty Studies, SAU, Dhaka, Bangladesh
<b>Research Area</b>	Community development and marketing systems improvement of agricultural products through improved supply and value chains/inclusive market development (IMD).

Dewan wants to contribute to social development in underdeveloped and developing countries, particularly targeting women smallholder farmers. With funding from SAURES, she is working on a project entitled: Micro-enterprise development through value chain development of non-food agricultural products on indigenous women in Rangamati Hill.

Bisakha Dewan comes from Rangamati District, an area in the Chittagong Hills Tract (CHT), Bangladesh, where the traditional *jhum* or “slash and burn” type of agriculture is practiced. “There is very little flat agricultural land available, so the farming communities use this method to clear the bushes on the hills, followed by planting using the broadcast method,” she explains. This farming method has negative effects on the environment, creating soil erosion and pollution. Dewan laments that farmers in the region rarely practice value addition, which would improve their incomes from agriculture. “Few modern agricultural technologies are practiced in the region, which has led to generations producing the very same agricultural products,” she says. “Ideally, you could make more money if you dry or pickle vegetables, or add more value—you could keep them longer and sell them at a later date.”

Dewan wants to contribute to social development in underdeveloped and developing countries, particularly targeting women smallholder farmers. “Women farmers are confined to local markets where prices are significantly lower than in urban markets,” she explains. With funding from Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural Research System (SAURES), Dewan is working on a project entitled: Micro-enterprise development through value chain development of non-food agricultural products on indigenous women in Rangamati Hill. “Off-season, the women make clothing using traditional handloom weaving, but during the agricultural season, they sell farm produce,” says Dewan. “My focus is on the factors affecting the weaving development process and the possibilities of market linkages of

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Dewan is one of a growing number of women agricultural scientists who have won an AWARD Fellowship. AWARD works toward inclusive, agriculture-driven prosperity for the African continent by strengthening the production and dissemination of more gender-responsive agricultural research and innovation. We invest in scientists, research institutions, and agribusinesses to deliver sustainable, gender-responsive agricultural research and innovation.

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handloom products outside the district. I would like to understand why they cannot make different items and sell them in the market, or for those with more money, rent a small shop to sell their handloom products.”

Dewan researches the development of women farmers, looking at opportunities to improve their socio-economic conditions.

Her goal is to develop a marketing system—using the concept of IMD—to anchor smallholder women farmers with markets. “IMD is a concept that prioritizes market linkages and sustainable food value chains that lead to empowerment, as well as social and economic development,” she explains. Dewan would like to see the women working in groups and expanding their markets to other countries. “In Rangamati, where traditional agricultural methods are used, products are organic—no fertilizer or pesticides are used—and these products are in demand globally, so if I can connect these women to the markets, this would be a great supply chain linkage,” she says. “Training in product processing, leadership skills, public speaking, and marketing are essential for women farmers to promote agribusiness development.”

Dewan would like to see both African and Asian smallholder women farmers actively participating not only in production but also in marketing their products. “When women are involved in marketing systems, they communicate with other people and broaden their worldview,” she asserts. “I want to encourage women to embrace entrepreneurship to ensure that they get higher returns, while gaining leadership skills, increasing their confidence, and overcoming financial problems.” Recognizing that empowering women through market systems is a process that will take time, Dewan is determined to invest her time and effort in the pursuit. “If women have more money, they can participate in decision making, have better nutrition and improved access to education for their children.” Dewan emphasizes the importance of training women farmers on the agricultural value chain to increase their capacity. “Why are the big farms getting all the benefits of agribusiness?” she laments. “Women farmers can also contribute to their countries’ economic development through agribusiness.” Her dream is to see each farming family engaging in agribusiness. “Only then can women farmers in Africa and Asia improve their livelihoods,” she asserts.

Dewan would like to pursue PhD studies, specializing in women’s empowerment through IMD, as it is relatively new field of study in her country. Through her participation in the AWARD Fellowship, Dewan would like to improve her research, teaching, and networking skills. “My first priority is to be a good researcher,” she says.

“It is difficult to break through societal barriers that govern interactions between different groups,” notes Dewan, citing this as one of the challenges she faces as a researcher. “There are few women scientists and researchers, making it difficult to find senior women to act as mentors.” She would like to be a leading agribusiness scientist in her country in the future.