Climate Centre

BANGLADESH RED CRESCENT SOCIETY BDRCS

German Red Cross

HUMAN STORY

A new dawn:

How timely cash support changed a widow's life

Mst. Vanu Begam in her home, Rajshahi city, Bangladesh @ BDRCS

December 2025

Story of Mst. Vanu Begam, Old Age Allowance programme recipient, Ward No. 4, Rajshahi City

I am very satisfied with the process (BDRCS cash distribution),” she said. “It shows we are not forgotten. I hope this continues in the future.”

Tin sheets purchased by Mst. Vanu Begam to protect her home against extreme heat and heavy rainfall @ BDRCS

For 77-year-old widow Mst. Vanu Begam, every rainfall and heatwave has been a test of survival. Living in a fragile hut with a leaking tin roof, her days were marked by discomfort and indignity. “Whenever I tried to read namaz,” she recalls softly, “the rain would fall through the roof and drench me; and on hot days, the sun’s burning rays pierced straight inside my hut.”

Life had been this way for years, one season bringing water, the next bringing fire. As an elderly widow depending only on the government’s Old Age Allowance, she could barely cover her daily needs, let alone make repairs to her home.

Then came a small but timely lifeline. As part of the shock responsive social protection (SRSP) simulation conducted by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), Vanu Begam received 2,400 BDT directly into her hands. The cash was meant to demonstrate how existing government schemes like the Old Age Allowance could be adapted to provide rapid, anticipatory support ahead of climate extremes like heatwaves or heavy rainfall.

For Vanu Begam, it meant something far greater. Within 14 days, she put the money to good use; not on luxuries or herself, but on her family and her home. With pride in her eyes, she pointed to the two tin sheets she had purchased and fixed over her damaged roof. “At last, I can pray without being drenched or scorched,” she said.

With some of the remaining money, she helped her son, who had been waiting for a medical operation for months. Only after that did she spend what was left on food for her household.

A week before the transfer, a BDRCS volunteer visited Vanu Begam to let her know she would be receiving financial support. The day before, she received another call confirming that the money would arrive the next day. This clear communication was very different from the government’s Old Age Allowance, where payments often come without notice, mainly to prevent fraud and theft. For Vanu Begam, the advance information made all the difference, she could plan ahead. When the eagerly awaited support arrived, she described it as nothing short of a blessing. “I am very satisfied with the process,” she said. “It shows we are not forgotten. I hope this continues in the future.”

The day after receiving the money, Vanu Begam offered blessings in her morning prayers to those who helped her. “They helped me in my poverty and hardship,” she says, her voice filled with gratitude.

For her, this support was more than cash. It was dignity restored, protection against the rain and the sun, and a reminder that in the face of climate shocks, even the most vulnerable deserve to be seen, supported, and given the chance to live with comfort and pride.

Interview & story by:
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