



Krishan began when iPAGE started to work closely on a grassroots level with over 250 smallholder farmers.



Krishan members transport the produce from farmers, with necessary precautions.

Bridging the gap between farmers and local consumers

ASHLEY SHOFTORSHI SAMADDAR

Krishan, a digital market platform created by iPAGE & Partners, started with a vision to help farmers sell their produce through e-commerce. Led by Mashrur H Shurid, Mohammad Saifullah Mithu, and Labib Tarafdar, this social welfare initiative was launched on May 1, 2020.

The journey of Krishan began when iPAGE started to work closely on a grassroots level with over 250 smallholder farmers of five districts, enabling them with precise agriculture-based technologies to optimise their farming practices.

Amidst the nationwide shutdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, farmers were experiencing unprecedented difficulties to sell their produce on time at fair prices. "By the end of March 2020, we started to receive a lot of calls from our farmers," shares Mashrur H Shurid, Chief Executive Officer of iPAGE and Managing Partner of Krishan. "After being closely involved with them for the last two years, especially in the production sector, we knew they would eventually end up with no other choice but to either sell their harvest on very low prices or

destroy their produce with their own hands. That is when we discovered the necessity of doing something for proper product distribution."

With support from local NGOs, YY Goshti and the iDEA project under the ICT Division of the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology, Krishan has sourced nearly 12.5 tonnes of vegetables, spice and poultry items directly from smallholder farmers and sold them to 104 urban customers. These fresh produces came from 206 rural farmers of Tangail, Pabna, Munshiganj and Panchagarh.

With the sourcing support from Krishan, a coalition of four social organisations has distributed healthy cooked meals to around 30,000 low-income groups in Dhaka during Ramadan. To help the middle-income families, Krishan also introduced a rationing process called 'Krishan Goodie Bag' comprising of essential groceries and seasonal vegetables bought from farmers. People contributed in the process by donating goodie bags while purchasing produces from Krishan. Team Krishan also subsidised the packaging and logistic costs and ensured proper distribution of those goodie bags

among 154 families with the help of their partner social organisations. While purchasing directly from smallholder farmers, Krishan offered comparatively higher prices to the local wholesale markets based on the unit production costs that eventually led to an additional profit earning of 18 to 25 percent, to the supplier-farmers.

One of their biggest challenges so far has been transporting the produce from the countryside to the city. However, this challenge was eased when Bangladesh Post Office stepped in and offered their 'Krishok Bandhu Postal Service' for free. Furthermore, since quality assurance and hazard-free preservation of the produce remain another challenge, a team of expert agriculturists and nutritionists from iPAGE, their local NGO partners, and concerned Upazila extension officers are channeling their energies and efforts towards assisting Krishan. Storage and fulfillment are two more issues that the team is working hard to stabilise.

At present, Krishan is sourcing fresh, chemical-free seasonal vegetables, spices, and poultry items from smallholder farmers. They plan to introduce seasonal fruits as well as anti-biotic neutral safe dairy and

fishery products in the near future. Subsequently, they are looking forward to more partnerships with local stakeholders. "We are also working to devise block-chain tech and want to collaborate with concerned government authorities, including the DAE, DAM, BSTI and BCSIR," mentions Mashrur. "At the moment, Krishan is operating only within Dhaka but gradually we would like to spread out and scale up as a nationwide premium food chain."

The team of Krishan aims to develop a transparent, tech-based and sustainable supply chain platform of safe perishable items that would deliver higher values both at producer and consumer levels. "We are already being supported by the government through initiatives like Startup Bangladesh and Food For Nation. Global communities like the UNDP have been helping our parent, iPAGE, to optimise their impact strategies at the agricultural production sector for a long time," he adds. "It is impractical to fill our stomachs with the "experience" of food. So, we need a real-time, effective and efficient production and distribution process to bring it to our kitchens," concludes Mashrur.



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Zurich - One Young World Scholarship



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CSR Window Bangladesh takes commendable steps to battle the coronavirus pandemic



Through Shomporko, CSR Window Bangladesh has provided food and necessary items to low-income families in rural areas.

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Window Bangladesh started their journey in 2018. Founded by Shadman Sakib Anik and Ahsan Rony, CSR Window Bangladesh mainly works with underprivileged communities. The organisation initially served as a skill donation platform that facilitated educational sessions to help individuals learn and enhance their skill set. Four projects by this organisation, established to cater to the needs of people in the coronavirus pandemic, are currently underway.

Their *Kindness* campaign, initiated in March, has successfully conducted awareness-based workshops. Emphasising on the importance of maintaining social distance, they also installed posters in over 1200 shops and pharmacies across the country, especially in the rural areas. In collaboration with Epyllion Group, Global Shapers - Dhaka Hub, Control Union Bangladesh and ActionAid Bangladesh, the organisation has been working closely with people

through *Kindness* Ambassadors. They are also providing regular announcements and updates in this regard.

Their project *Shomporko*, initiated in partnership with IDLC Finance Limited, aims at providing food and necessary supplies to low income families in rural areas. This initiative also gave way to building a database for future use, containing records of around 12,000 people who have already received the aid.

Through their awareness-based initiative *Shuddhota*, organised in association with WaterAid and Control Union, Bangladesh, they helped install hand washing stations, which are made with materials that cannot be damaged or stolen. These stations, along with social distance markers and posters, are being set up in large bazaars, some of which still host over 8,000 visitors regularly. Their on-field Ambassadors are constantly urging people to maintain social distance and wash their hands, while visiting such crowded places.

Pregnant and lactating women are at high risk in this pandemic, particularly in low-in-

come households. *Achol*, a project aided by Arla and Dano Mom, aims to provide a month's nutrition to 8,000 mothers across 24 districts of the country. A database has also been created in this regard to help them with such facilities on a regular basis.

Their fourth project *Pashe Achi*, is a food sharing initiative based in Dhaka. It was initially designed for individuals who are keen to help others in this time of crisis, but were not willing to risk their own safety by going out. *Pashe Achi* asked such individuals to cook and pack food for at least 10 people. The packets were collected and distributed to the ones who need them. In the first couple of active weeks, the *Kindness* ambassadors received over a thousand food packets, which were distributed properly. So far, they have provided food to more than 13,000 people in the span of 24 days. "In light of this feat, we intend to expand our effort to stand beside more people every day," said Sultana Razia, Lead Coordinator, *Pashe Achi*. The team looks forward to keeping their initiatives active.



Through Pashe Achi, they have distributed food to people in need.