

A boost to women empowerment

BRAC turns ultra poor into craftswomen: All 64 workers of Sunanda Shoe Factory are women

E A M ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Ultra poor illiterate rural women, if mobilised and trained, can be good craftswomen, bread earners for their families and contributors to the national economy.

Sunanda Shoe Factory, where all workers are women, is an example.

BRAC has set up the laudable example in Shutipara village in Kundopukur union, two kilometres from Nilphamari town.

They produce fashionable shoes and sandals, now in good demand in markets beyond the district.

Each worker works six days a week and earns Tk 300 to Tk 350, depending on her work.

The remarkable success under BRAC's TUP (targeting the Ultra Poor) project was achieved in less than two years. The work was started in April 2002.

Initially, BRAC selected 30 ultra poor women. Windows, women from landless and erosion victim families, wives having poor and ailing husbands and women having no access to any kind of loan either from government or NGO were given preference.

They were given one-year training on shoe-making. During training, each woman was given Tk 30 as allowance and Tk 5 for lunch a day. Another 30 women were trained in the second batch.

Now, 64 female workers are working there in eight groups, eight in each.

The Chief Trainer, Sheikh Md Safaruddin, said the women are doing all the work with hand. Each group is divided into two sections,



A new life for the ultra poor ... women making (left) and giving finishing touches to shoes and sandals at Sunanda Shoe Factory at Shutipara village in Nilphamari.

one producing the upper part of the shoe or sandal and the other producing the lower part (sole).

They are also using machines for cutting the leather, sewing, preparing the sole from rubber, designing and colouring the product.

Now they are producing 400 to 500 pairs of sandals a week. The demand is less in the wet season.

There are two supervisors - Nurul Islam and Abdus Samad.

Another NGO - JOBS - provided the initial technical support in setting up the factory, said Bazlur Rashid Sarkar, Chief Co-ordinator of BRAC's TUP project in Nilphamari. Now BRAC is running it alone.

There are other distinctive fea-

tures also. Group meetings are held once a week where ten topics are discussed. These include health education, social development and awareness against dowry and early marriage, Bazlur Rashid said.

He also informed that each worker gets a tube well and materials for sanitary latrine for free.

Factory Manager Enayet Hossen said BRAC is now giving subsidy to run it. BRAC may decide to distribute the profit among the workers when the factory will be profitable, he said.

"It is our satisfaction that we are turning the ultra poor women into skilled workers. Soon we will raise that number of female workers to 100".



PHOTO: STAR

"Now 70 shops in 11 upazilas (in Nilphamari district) are our whole sale buyers", said Marketing Officer Tarun Shah. The products are now supplied to Panchagarh and Dinajpur districts also because those are cheaper, he said. Prices range from Tk 100 to 130, he said.

Sazzad Hossain, owner of Sazzad Shoe Factory in Domar Bazar in Domar upazila, said the designs of Sunanda shoes and sandals are attractive to customers and those are cheaper.

Factory worker Morzina Begum, 40, of Koipara village, said she became helpless with her three children including a retarded daughter after her day labourer

husband became paralysed. She now feels secure after getting the job. Julekha Begum, 35, of Shipairpara village said her rickshaw-puller husband used to beat her. She and her four children had to remain half fed with her husband's income. Julekha now supplements the family income. Her husband does not beat her any more. Two of her children go to school.

Chairman of Kundopukur Union Parishad said he is proud that such a factory is in his area.

"Many distressed women who used to queue for doles earlier are not seen during relief distribution now. They are better off".

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

The Sunamganj district administration has launched a unique programme - 'food for net' - to save fish fries in haors in the district.

Under the experimental project launched in the Sadar upazila on July 2, people living on banks of haors and nearby areas are being given rice on deposit of fishing nets and a commitment not to catch fish fries in the current monsoon season.

They have also been assured of interest-free loan.

The rice is being distributed by Union Parishads under VGD (Vulnerable Group Development) cards, which will remain valid for two months.

Official sources said about 2000 nets were deposited to local bodies since launch of the programme. The nets would be returned after the period.

The programme has earned good support from the local people, said a number of villagers.

It has been launched considering the precarious situation in the haor areas, battered by floods twice this year.

People in the haor areas are dependent mainly on agriculture, but most of the farmers lost their IRRI-Boro crop in April and there is no scope to raise any food crop this year.

Traditionally, the haor people

do not have any work during the wet season, when they mainly depend on fishing for livelihood.

According to an official estimate, fries worth about Tk one crore are caught yearly in the district, causing depletion of fish resources.

Though there is restriction on catching fish fries, it goes on unabated as the law can not be enforced strictly because of the prevailing situation and dearth of law enforcers.

An interim arrangement done by the district administration last year stopped indiscriminate fishing in the Tangar Haor. It produced good results. There was good spawning in the vast Tangar Haor and fries of different species spread to almost all the adjacent water bodies this year.

But netting of fries could not be stopped totally despite deployment of several mobile courts because poor people remain without work for over six months during the wet season.

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Considering all these, the administration started the 'food for net' programme, sources said.

A wide publicity on the 'food for net' programme was made through loudspeakers even in remote villages. People responded well.

Shamsu Miah of Joykalosh village said, people are depositing

their fishing nets because they are given rice for survival and have been assured of interest-free loan, which will save them from moneylenders.

They are convinced that saving the fries will increase the fish resources and bring good days for them after some months, who give loan on high interest rate, Shamsu Miah said.

While talking to The Daily Star, Sunamganj Deputy Commissioner Jafar Siddiquee said, "We have started the programme after consulting the local people for their greater interest."

"The response is very good. People are coming up with a different attitude as we are giving rice under a certain programme, not as relief, when most of the haor people are jobless and badly hit by crop damage."

Different commercial banks have been asked to give interest-free loan to the net depositors.

"Soon we will expand the programme to Tahirkhali and some other upazilas may also be included", he said.

Besides, Tk 2 crore has been sanctioned by the relief ministry for the flood ravaged Sunamganj district, the DC said.

"We are working out the guideline for distribution of the amount under a programme which will really benefit the poor", he added.

Khulna Mayor fears 'attempt on life any moment'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Eight persons were arrested as suspects of a bomb attack incident here on Wednesday.

Khulna city BNP senior vice president Sekhander Zafrullah Khan Shachu, 52, sustained critical injuries. The incident occurred at 8:30 PM near his house on Gagan Babu Road.

The FIR was under process which might be recorded by officer-in-charge (OC) Mosharef Hossain as complainant.

However, none of the injured BNP leader's families wanted to lodge any complaint.

Meanwhile, condition of the injured BNP leader was stated to be critical. He was undergoing treatment at the Intensive Care Unit of Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH).

His left forearm below the elbow was blown off by the bomb attack. He also sustained severe splinter injuries on other parts of the body.

The BNP leader who is also secretary of Khulna Shishu Hospital and a member of the executive committee of Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) came under bomb attack when he was going to his office by a rickshaw. At that time there was no electricity in the area. President of Ward No 29 unit of BNP and contractor Manzur Morshed Khokon was also going with Shachu to the party office by the same rickshaw. But he escaped unhurt, while rickshaw-puller Rubel Gazi, 17, was injured slightly in the bomb attack. He was released from KMCH on Thursday morning.

Khokon will be one of the eye-witnesses in the incident, said AC Anisuzzaman.

Khan Shachu who sustained severe injuries in a bomb attack near his house on Wednesday night also sought security for him at 2:45 pm on the day. The Mayor advised him to move cautiously and rely on Almighty Allah. Three more top city BNP leaders including a ward commissioner are also in the hit list of extremists, according to the Mayor.

But, the Mayor expressed his reluctance to comment on the reason of attack on the city BNP vice president.

However, he did not rule out intra-party feud as a reason.

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Notice

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Dhaka



Leaders of Debhata-Kaligonj Bhumihin Sangram Committee addressing a press conference in Satkhira town on Thursday

'Lease khas lands to the landless as per ministry order'

Landless people's leader tells press confce in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

The Debhata-Kaligonj Bhumihin Sangram Committee at a press conference here on Thursday urged the district administration to take steps to lease over 618 acres of khas lands in nine villages in Debhata and Kaligonj upazilas among landless people.

Pran Ballav Mondal, general secretary of the committee, in a written statement at the press conference claimed that the land ministry in a letter to the Satkhira Deputy Commissioner on June 22 asked the administration to take steps in the regard. But nothing is being done, he alleged.

The land ministry letter followed a joint appeal to the Prime Minister made on June 16 by the landless families for her intervention for lease of the lands in their favour.

He said about 1000 landless fami-

lies are living on the lands for years. But over the years, land grabbers got the lands leased in their favour in connivance with a section of corrupt officials.

These lands were leased to the vested quarters for shrimp cultivation by showing those as 'special waterbodies', he claimed. But those are actually agricultural khas lands, he said.

Mondal said fierce clashes took place in the past between land grabbers and the landless people who are in possession of the lands in different areas. The clashes took place as hired goons clashed with the landless people to take possession of the lands, he told the press conference.

Clashes may erupt any moment if the administration does not take prompt steps to lease the lands in favour of the landless, he said.

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Among others, Abdul Wahab Sarder, president of the committee, Abdul Bari, Shawkat Ali and Maizuddin were present at the press conference.

He also put forward a five-point demand, which include identification of the so-called 'special waterbodies' as khas lands, withdrawal of the "false" cases against some of the landless people.

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