

Organic farming training helps create self-employment



A female farmer busy attending medicinal trees at Agmundia village under Kaliganj upazila of Jhenidah.

PHOTO: STAR

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

An organic farming training center has been built on 8 acres of land in a remote area under Kaliganj upazila. This is the first such training center in these parts of Bangladesh, made possible through the initiative of a Japan-based voluntary NGO known as Hunger Free World. The farmers and female workers of different districts are receiving training from the center, which is housed in two four-storyed building in Kaliganj upazila. An education building was established in 2001 in pourashava area on 15 decimals of land which was provided by a benevolent man of the upazila. The second building is an organic farming training center established in 2010 at Agmundia village on 27 bighas of land under Kaliganj upazila town.

Hunger Free World's in-charge, Hafizur Rahman, said that computer training is available at the education building. Besides, there are Suniketon Diptimoy Patshala, Suniketon Library and a residential dormitory here. Hundreds of students are provided computer training for three months and a certificate is provided to them by Bangladesh Technical Education Board while Suniketon Patshala imparts quality education to the kids from classes play group to five. People from all walks of life study different kinds of books on agriculture at Suniketon library and apply their

knowledge in preparing vermin compost and other materials.

Organic farming training center in-charge, SM Shahin informed that this center has been built in 2010 with training on seven topics of agriculture: compost (earthworm, bokashi, quick compost, liquid compost, light compost, compost hip, compost pit, and herbal compost), insecticide, organic farming, poison-free farming, herbal training, training on tailoring and apiculture. Around 800 women workers have been trained on organic farming while hundreds of male farmers have been provided training on fish cultivation.

Besides, residential training on different topics have been provided to 50 female workers. Shahin mentioned that an unpaved road about one kilometer long runs to the training center but it needs to be paved. The foreigners cannot visit the spot easily due to the earthen road. The offices also suffer from the lack of electricity supply. Tk 1.5 lacs have been deposited to Palli Electricity Samity office but the connection has not been provided yet. Most of the activities are hampered due to lack of electricity. Shahin said, there are 300 kinds of medicinal trees in its complex.

Of the trainees some successful women are Juthi Begum, Parul Mahmuda of Mollipur village, Razia Khatun, Monoara Begum, a UP member of Mostabupur village, Rebeka Khatun, Sona Bhan, and

Nazma Khatun of Dapna village, Basonti Rani of Raigram village, Monoara Begum and Anwara Begum of Neamotpur village and others.

Sona Bhan told this correspondent that she does not run after VGF or VGD card. She earns Tk 20,000 per month producing compost fertilizer. She is increasing her vermin compost farming day by day. Rebeka Khatun said that she was a maid servant before taking training at the organic farming training center. Now she is solvent, and self-reliant. She is able to maintain her family as well as bear the educational expenses of her sons and daughters. Ex-UP member and social worker Rezaul Islam of Agmundia village informed that the farmers of the area have been highly benefited by the organic farming training center. Around 500 farmers are now following organic method of cultivation on their farms.

Fish farmer Enamul Haq said that he has taken training from the training center and now earns good profits by cultivating fish. He has learnt to produce Bokashi fertilizer and Emu which is very useful for fish farming. He will never apply chemical fertilizer again in his fish farms, he added.

Raigram UP Chairman Jahurul Islam said, "We thank the authority for building this training center. The initiative taken by the organization is no doubt a noble one. The male and female farmers are being enormously benefitted by the center." "We want safe food and poison free vegetables," said Country Director of Hunger Free World, Ataur Rahman Miton. "This is why this organic farming training center has been built here. We will build an organic restaurant here as well," he added.

Two girls of Teesta Char village Narsingh of Aditmari upazila in Lalmonirhat go to high school for studying in the mainland every day, as their parents now understand the value of education.

Girls of chars now have access to education

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

A radical change has been brought about in Teesta and Dharla river basin chars as the girls are now involving themselves in education. Earlier, there were hardly any initiative to enroll girls into school and they had no access to education due to a number of barriers and challenges. The barriers mainly include gender prejudices, limited opportunities, negative attitude of the society, early marriage, etc. Moreover, due to poor communication system and geographical remoteness, retention rate of the girls after passing primary schools was lower in the char areas.

Things have changed. Now, the girls of chars are no more backward and they have come to know about their rights through awareness-building programmes among parents by different NGOs round the year. Therefore parents are aware about their girl children's education needs and they have started sending them to high schools, even to colleges. Four char villages at Teesta River basin Sholmari, Char Shalhati Nohani, Char Kalikapur and Votmari Paschim Char under Votmari Union of Kaliganj Upazila in the district have experienced remarkable

change. Girls of these chars are aware about their rights, and most of them go to the high school. All these have become possible only for awareness building events, such as meetings, drama shows and discussion at these char villages round the year under the Char Health and Education Project of the NGO Own Village Advancement (OVA). OVA officials said, gender discrimination was one of the biggest problems among the char people, and char people always favoured boys and they neglected children born as girls. The people of chars did not have any intent to educate their daughters, but they are wiser and are sending their daughters to schools, same as their sons.

The male persons at these char villages are taking care of their child daughters' education, and they discuss among themselves that daughters should not be neglected, daughters can bring happiness in our family," said OVA's Technical Officer, Khandaker Reaz Ahmed. Talking to Manirul Islam, Abdul Quddus, Mohor Ali, Shamsul Islam and many others at Char Kalikapur said, this correspondent found out that they used to consider female children a burden but now they consider them as assets.

Aklima Akhter of Char Sholmari now reads in class eight in the mainland school; she hopes that she will continue her education to the college and even the university level. "I work at home and in the field to produce crops after and before my school," she added. "Our elder sisters finished their studies at the primary level, as they weren't allowed to go high school. But I, along with many other char girls are now studying," said Beauty Akhter of char Votmari.

Salma Khatun of Char Narsingh said, she runs a small grocery shop in the char village after and before the school and earns to support her educational expense, and her family. "I'm aware about my rights, and I am determined to continue my studies," she said. Ahsanul Kabir Bulu, OVA's Project Manager, said that the people of chars are highly interested to educate their daughters since they realize the benefits of doing so in the long run. Suzit Kumar Ghosh, OVA's Executive Director informed that the NGO will continue development work in the char areas of Teesta and Dharla Rivers in the districts and continue to improve the lifestyles of the char people.



A fruiting amra (hog plum) tree at Kamal Hossen's roadside plantation at Putiakhali in Rajapur upazila under Jhalakathi district.

Teenage boy killed to 'realise borrowed money'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A teenage boy was found murdered inside a shop allegedly for realising borrowed money in Shantimoi area under Hakimpur upazila on Sunday.

The deceased is Sabuj Chandra Roy, 18, son of Gonesh Chandra Roy of Chhoto Jalalpur Naopara village.

Sabuj's brother-in-law Nripen Chandra Roy filed a murder case with Hakimpur police station on Monday, accusing one Rajib Hasan and Zahid Hossain.

Family sources said Sabuj went out of his house on Saturday afternoon and since then he remained missing. His cell phone also remained switched off.

The victim, however, phoned one of his relatives at midnight, saying that Rajib and Zahid confined him to a shop in Shantimoi area of the upazila for Tk 10,000 which he borrowed from them a few months ago.

"The duo also threatened to kill Sabuj if he did not pay the money within Sunday morning," said Nripen.

Nripen went to Rajib's shop with the amount for Sabuj's release early Sunday.

"But Rajib fled the scene on my arrival," Nripen said. Being informed, police went to the spot and recovered the hanging body of Sabuj from the shop after breaking its lock in the evening, said Ahsan Habib, officer in-charge of the police station.

The boy was strangled and later hung from the ceiling, suspected police.

Growing tasty amra on unused roadside lands

It brings good profit for years

M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL, Jhalakathi

A good number of farmers are now engaged in profitable cultivation of hog plum, locally known as amra, using roadside lands for the purpose.

Kamal Hossen Talukder of Putiakhali in Rajapur upazila, who started commercial farming of the plum in the area in 2005, later helped many others to do the same.

"Seeing such farming in Swarupkuthi upazila of Pirojpur district, I planted 170 hog plum trees on unused lands beside the road and the boundary lines of land, spending Tk 20 thousand," said Kamal.

"After three years, the trees bore fruits that earned me Tk 60 thousand. Later my yearly earning from selling hog plums stood up to Tk 1 lakh."

"With hardly any investment further, I have been earning from selling the hog plums and it will hopefully continue for 20 more years," he said.

"Hog plum cultivation requires no pesticide and the fruit can be stored for two or three weeks without any preservative. The land of the area is very suitable for growing tasty hog plums," said Kamal.

Md Rezaul Hasan, upazila agriculture officer (acting) of Rajapur, said, "Usually a hog plum tree lives 20 to 30 years. Its cultivation brings good profit for relatively low investment. The buds appear in April and May and the fruits mature in August and September."

"As many as 120 farmers are now engaged in commercial cultivation of hog plum on 110 hectares of land in the upazila that produces quality hog plums, he added.

Daulatkhan launch terminal 'risky', needs urgent repair

JAYANTA KUMAR BISWAS, Bhola

Birshreshtho Mostafa Kamal Launch Terminal in Daulatkhan upazila under the district is in dire need of repair as around 1500 passengers daily use it for going to and from different areas including Dhaka and Noakhali.

Three Dhaka-bound launches, a Noakhali-bound sea truck and several trawlers come to the terminal every day.

Visiting the spot last week, this correspondent saw around 40 passengers waiting for Dhaka-bound launch MV Farhan-3 at 5:00pm.

In absence of any sitting arrangement and toilet, the

waiting passengers, especially women and children have to undergo untold sufferings.

Each passenger has to pay Tk 5 for entry to the pontoon.

The pontoon was floated to the middle of the Meghna River after its ropes were torn due to a squall on August 9.

The day after, it was brought back to the bank and tied up temporarily.

The muddy road connecting the pontoon is in a bad condition, making entrance of vehicles impossible.

Passengers and labourers have to walk on a narrow bridge made of bamboo and wood to enter the pontoon.

Bilkis Begum carrying a three-year-old child in her lap was seen too cautious while crossing the bridge to enter the pontoon.

"Even after entering the pontoon, we are passing worrying time as it may go to the mid-river anytime," said Rizia Begum, another passenger.

Motahar Hossian, a day labourer who carries luggage of passengers at the terminal, said it is too risky to walk on the narrow wooden stairway, especially while carrying goods.

For years, Local Government Engineering Department, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority and Water Development Board did not

do necessary works for the terminal, said stakeholders.

Mahabubur Rahman, lessee of the terminal, said, "We had to pay over Tk 22 lakh for yearly lease but the authorities did not take action to protect the pontoon and make an approach road. We have to maintain things temporarily with the help of labourers and local shop owners."

Md Nasim, traffic officer of BIWTA, said they informed the higher authorities about the condition of this terminal.

Mostafizur Rahman, upazila nirbahi officer of Daulatkhan, said he wrote to LGED, WDB and BIWTA authorities about the problem.



Birshreshtho Mostafa Kamal Launch Terminal in Daulatkhan upazila under Bhola district remains in an awful condition, making passengers cross a risky wood and bamboo structure (inset) to enter the pontoon.