



Sanwar Hossain Man with a Vision

Even without the ability to see with his eyes, Sanwar Hossain is a man with a vision only a few could ever dream up, let alone transform into reality. Ever since the ferry ghat where he was selling chocolates as a street hawker closed down in 2001, and after failing to get employment anywhere because of being visually-impaired, Hossain decided to become the master of his own destiny.

In 2004, with just 21 members, he opened an organisation called Protibandhi Punorbashon and Manobadhikar Samity. The organisation works for the rehabilitation and development of people with all sorts of disabilities, by providing them with motivation for work along with training on sewing, computers, dairy farming, shopkeeping and other skills.

So far, 629 physically challenged people in Ishwardi have received training for self-employment and other support from the organisation and are now all generating their own income. About 50-60 physically challenged students too have received help for their education and training from Hossain's organisation.

It has recently opened a small sewing training centre with a mini garment factory to accommodate the physically challenged workers on its premises. But, as ever, Hossain still continues to dream bigger.

Defying all odds, these physically challenged people are now on the path to becoming self-reliant. They are among the 629 people, motivated and trained by a local organisation in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila. They have vowed not to give up despite their disabilities as they want to work hard, earn money and live a happy life.



Sanwar Hossain

Source story: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

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Himu Akhter: Inspiring Girls, Promoting Education

Class-five schoolgirl Himu Akhter isn't shy to make her voice heard. The student of Purbo Dawabari Madhyapara Government Primary School in a char area of Lalmonirhat's Teesta River is determined that students of schools in remote areas need not accept less than full educational facilities.

In many ways, Himu is just an ordinary school-goer. Like many classmates, she sets off each morning to walk the three kilometres across sandy land before catching a boat across the Teesta River to reach campus. Her family struggles: whereas five years ago they owned 20 bighas of land, river erosion has been responsible for reducing that to four.

But what distinguishes the ten-year-old is her active and vocal commitment to achieving a properly equipped school.

"Char-area schools are always neglected," she says. "We miss out on good teachers, basic provisions like chairs and tables, sporting equipment, infrastructure, even gardens at our campuses."

Over the last five months Himu has been instrumental in changing the situation. She has already succeeded in securing hygienic toilets, a tube well, a garden and more benches for her school.

According to assistant teacher Afroza Khatun, Himu together with fellow students have brought about a lot of change. "Due to their efforts we have become very careful to ensure dedicated teaching in our classrooms, and the school's infrastructure is improving day by



Class V student Himu Akhter (left) talking to her fellows on the premises of Purbo Dawabari Madhyapara Government Primary School in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat. The 10-year-old girl has already turned up as a successful students' rights activist in the remote char area.

PHOTO: STAR

day," the assistant teacher says.

Himu's activism stems from a week-long taskforce seminar she attended along with fourteen other students, held by NGO SKS in March 2016 under their Safe School Project. The training aims to motivate students to work towards achieving their rights in schools.

"We sit for weekly meetings with our

teachers," Himu explains, "to discuss how students' rights will be realised and how the education atmosphere can be improved."

Now students of other schools in the area are building awareness of their rights too, following Himu Akhter's lead.

With her sister Shimu Akhter currently studying in class four, and two younger

brothers due to attend the same school, Himu has additional reason to wish for the school's development. But beyond that, Himu is driven by a dream that all students in the shoal areas can enjoy rights and facilities equal to those of their mainland counterparts.

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