



Nur Nahar Akter Sweety started her farm in her backyard in 2015, when she learned that many of her neighbours were earning a living in this way. PHOTOS: STAR

NURTURING DREAMS

Thriving as poultry entrepreneurs

MOSTAFA SHABUI, From Bogura

Around 150 students in Sherpur, Bogura, are making profits by rearing *deshi* (local breed) chickens at their own rooftops or backyards.

Dr Mohammad Ryhan, a veterinary surgeon of the Sherpur Livestock Office, provides technical support to these students, and 900 other farmers. In 2015, he started the initiative, "Shwapno Chhowar Shiri", to promote farming. Today, there are 1,000 local breed chicken farms across the 30 villages of Sherpur, according to him. He established a training centre, where he educates nearly 3,000 young entrepreneurs about poultry farming. For his contribution, Dr Mohammad Ryhan received the Public Administration Award in 2019.

Nur Nahar Akter Sweety, 27, resides in Darkipara village. A master's student of Political Science at Govt Azizul Haque College, she currently earns BDT 10,000 to BDT 12,000 monthly, from her farm. She uses the profit towards her clothing shop set up at her home, from which she additionally earns BDT



Sohel Ahmed's farm, near his home.

5,000 to BDT 8,000 per month.

Sweety was married when she was a twelfth grader. Initially, she was very shy to talk about her educational expenses with her life partner. "I overcame financial struggles that I had faced in my early life. Now, I can help my family with my own earnings," she said. Sweety started her farm in her backyard in 2015, when she learned that many of her neighbours were earning a living in this way.

Zakaria Zakir, 22, a resident of Dhormokam village, is a Zoology student from Govt Azizul Haque College. His monthly income is BDT 30,000 to BDT 40,000. He started out with 25 hens, and now, he has 800 hens in his farm. To expand his business, Zakaria, along with a couple of his neighbours, locally built an incubator for hatching eggs, in 2019. Every week, they receive around 10,000 eggs, and sell them at BDT 3 to BDT 4 each.

These students acknowledged that local breed chickens are immensely profitable – they require little care, food, and space. Their meat and eggs are also priced higher, than those of broilers and layers.

Inspired by Zakir, Sohail Ahmed, another master's student from Chakpalia village, started rearing local breed chickens near his home, on a small area of land. He makes BDT 8,000 to BDT 10,000 per month. "It is very hard for fresh graduates to find jobs around here. I started this small venture to be an entrepreneur and reduce my hardships after I receive my master's degree," he said.

SPOTLIGHT

Transgender youth and the right to access public washrooms

NILIMA JAHAN

Although the practice of open defecation was declared 0 percent in Bangladesh in 2017, 22-year-old Nishita Nisha, a member of the third gender community in Dhaka, said that she is still sometimes forced to defecate in parks, footpaths or alleys.

Like many others of her community, Nishita spends most of her time in the day extorting money from commuters or shopkeepers or performing "Badhaai", a custom of conferring blessings on a newborn by singing and dancing.

However, they are hardly allowed in any residential restrooms or sometimes, even in public toilets.

"Once I approached a watchman of a house in Mirpur to allow me to use their toilet. He chased me out as if I was an animal. When I yelled back, he was going to beat me," said Nishita.

"People in-charge of public toilets are often reluctant to let us in, as other people scold them for allowing us. Besides, when we use the female washrooms, many feel scared of us, as if we are going to attack them. We face bullying and harassment in the male washrooms."

While the third gender was recognised by the government in 2013, transgender people continue to face discrimination in every aspect of their lives, including accessing healthcare services, education, safe living spaces, public transportation, and constitutional

rights. Although adequate and equitable sanitation with special attention to the needs of women and those in vulnerable situations, is closely related with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, Bangladesh still has a long way to go in terms of transgender people's right to sanitation. Md Moshir Rahman, Policy and Advocacy Manager of Bandhu Social Welfare Society, an organisation that works on the rights of sexual minorities, said that transgender people face more challenges when they enter formal workplaces. Bandhu Social Welfare Society has a separate toilet for transgender individuals in their office.

"We have approached the city corporations, the social welfare department of the government and some other ministries to sensitise them to the challenges of transgender people. However, we

are not seeing any progress," added Rahman.

Ivan Ahmed Kotha, President of Sacheton Shilpi Sangha, an organisation working for the rights of the third gender community, said that in the context of Bangladesh, a separate washroom for transgender people is a demand of the time.

"Otherwise, there must be a clear message in toilets regarding gender-segregation. If we are to use the female washroom, it must be clearly mentioned there so that people cannot make us feel ostracised," she said.

Samia Alim Shammi, a young transgender woman, owns a beauty salon named Uttar in Savar. She demanded separate washrooms for transgender people to avoid harassment and discrimination. "We need to make decent toilets accessible to everyone – irrespective of their age, gender identity or social status," she said.

However, although both city corporations in Dhaka work for establishing public toilets, they have no plans as of now to include space for transgender people in public toilets.

Dhaka North City Corporation's Executive Engineer Abul Kashem said that he is unaware of the discrimination transgender people face, and assured that he will look into the issue.

*Name has been changed for privacy.

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What does it take to build a business empire?

MD TAJDIN HASSAN

Binod K Chaudhary, the chairman of the CG Corp Global conglomerate group, is Nepal's first billionaire. He spoke at the Bangladesh Business Awards 2020, an initiative of The Daily Star. I recently had the privilege of reading his memoir, "Making It Big" (India Portfolio, 2016), in which he looks back upon his professional journey.

As the book recounts, Binod's family worked in the textile business. His father, Shri Lunkaran Das Chaudhary, and grandfather, Bhuramal Chaudhary, stepped into a valiant journey from Kathmandu to sell their products. Instead of learning about the world of business through textbooks and academic degrees, ten-year-old Shri Lunkaran started learning the trade from his own father. They set up their first proper clothing shop in 1934. In 1968, Shri Lunkaran started Arun's Emporium, Nepal's first department store catering to women, men, and children. Yet what felt like a dream shattered when he invested in several businesses only to see no promising returns.

Binod turned the tables around with the introduction of Wai Wai—a food brand that earned him the title of "Noodle King" and two percent of the world's shares in the noodle market. From regulations to finances, Binod faced the most onerous challenges, and despite the immense responsibility of expanding a family business successfully—transitioning from Bhuramal Lunkaran Das Chowdhury to the Chaudhary Group—he persevered.

I could trek through every word of this book with ease because of the humble yet hopeful tone Binod maintains. "[M]y most treasured possessions



are my experiences and my memories", he writes in the prologue, "A Rebeginning". His account situates his personal and familial history—their travels, their corporate ups and downs—in the wider history of Nepal and the Marwari community, whose involvement in the business sector stretches back to the years after the First World War. "Making It Big" is the story of a 23-year-old boy who never thought that he would become a billionaire. Young business professionals today are often quite restive when it comes to taking tough career choices. From this book, they can learn how to remain resilient and take one step at a time, not only to make their family proud, but to achieve heights that they might never have dreamt of.

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A snippet from the short film, "Jibon", for which Murshidul Alam Bhuiyan won the Meena Media Award 2019.

YOUTH IN ACTION

Connecting people through stories

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Team Bertho is a storytelling collective, initiated by a group of friends in 2016. "We present human experiences through creative mediums," shared Murshidul Alam Bhuiyan, the director of the collective.

They started out with short films, based on different social matters. Their film, "Never Give Up" aims to raise awareness about depression and other mental health issues. Similarly, "Atmohoty" addresses the increase in suicides, with the story of a boy who rediscovers himself by finding a reason to live.

Murshidul won the Meena Media Award 2019 for the short film "Jibon", which revolves around the importance of clean water for a healthy life. He also bagged the second prize at the BLAST Short Film Competition 2019. His film, "Responsibility", was declared as the Best Foreign Language Film at the Discovery Film Festival.

Team Bertho's book, "Fueling Hope" consists of stories by people from different walks of life. "We believe that these stories are capable of driving important changes," said Adibajerin, Editor of the book.

Additionally, "Berthodoler Caravan" is their regular podcast. The first season featured life lessons from different people, while the second season focused on the lives of teachers.

Their project, "Lockdown Blues: The Mind of a Teenager" explores young people's mental health during the pandemic, through a documentary.

Through their project, "A Letter to Yourself" Team Bertho presented an anthology of hand-written letters by young people to themselves, as

a milestone to acknowledge their personal growth and ambitions. Similarly, "Letter to Our Parents" and "Letters to Our Teachers" allowed these people to share tokens of love and gratitude with their elders.

Team Bertho recently gained popularity through their photo series. "This project, featuring well-known Bangla songs, narrates stories with emotive photography. Each picture recites the essence of the scenery and the people in the frame," added Tasnuva Tabassum Hridi, Art Director, Team Bertho.

The collective is currently working on the third season of their podcast. They are also planning to introduce "Lores For The Soul", a project featuring retellings of folk tales, mythological stories and lesser known fables. The members of Team Bertho are empowered by the support they receive from their audience, and intend to continue using creativity as a medium to bring about positive changes.

The author is a freelance journalist who likes reading, planning and scribbling. Write to her at mislammonamee@gmail.com.



Members of Team Bertho.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF TEAM BERTHO



ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD