

Women Business Centres: Transforming lives of rural women

Women in rural Bangladesh face numerous difficulties, starting from the prospect of child marriage, lack of access to healthcare facilities, to having no say in the financial matters of the household. They are reduced to being homemakers with no recognition for their hard work. Add to that a lack of training facilities to learn new skills, condemning them to live a life of misery.

To address the inequality that marginalised people face worldwide, Coca Cola's primary international philanthropic organisation, The Coca Cola Foundation was launched in 1984 and to achieve sustainable development, Coca Cola Company announced 5by20 in 2010, a global initiative to enable the economic empowerment of 5 million women entrepreneurs by 2020.

This is where the concept of Women Business Centre (WBC) comes in context to Bangladesh. These facilities are run by women and have been developed by The Coca Cola Foundation in partnership with United Purpose, an international development organisation. A tour for a group of media personnel were arranged in Bagerhat, Gopalganj and Tungipara to witness first-hand the WBCs in the rural areas and how these have helped the financial empowerment of rural women in Bangladesh.

"I was solely dependent on my husband's income and couldn't contribute anything financially. I have a BA degree

and decided to do something to improve my family's condition. So, I received training from The Coca Cola Foundation in business marketing and communication, I also enrolled myself for technical skills like tailoring, computer operating, and conducting pH tests," said Unnati Mondol, who runs a WBC in Pipradanga, Bagerhat since 2017.

Since the inception of WBC at



Pipradanga, Unnati Mondol, like other female entrepreneurs, has been operating her business with four other female entrepreneurs. The WBC model is essentially a cooperation driven business model, where entrepreneurs like Unnati will team up with other female entrepreneurs who have also received the necessary training and the members contribute to the business depending on their ability, by providing capital or products and then sharing the profits with everyone. The Coca Cola Foundation provides equipment's



like freezers, laptops, pH test kits and other essential things needed to conduct businesses.

To attain financial empowerment, a community-based model initiative has more chances of success.

Topoti Rani Majumder is an entrepreneur from Sontoshpur WBC, and has been farming organic vegetables and fish along with maintaining a grocery store. With the help of her fellow entrepreneurs, she provides services like selling grocery goods, vegetables, children's food etc.

Topoti Rani Majumder is a successful entrepreneur now, but like most rural, women she had faced various social obstacles.

"In the beginning it was very tough, people would laugh at us, make fun of us for trying to operate a business, like men do. These same people not only changed their views after they saw our hard work, but are also supporting us by becoming our customers. This has helped us have more

confidence and ultimately made us realise what we are capable of," said Topoti.

The unity between entrepreneurs is one of the unique aspects of this Women Business Centre, as the emphasis is having financial independence by working together. This goes to show how rural women can not only have a keen sense of entrepreneurship but also solidarity among them.

"My fellow entrepreneurs contribute to the business according to their capabilities, when it's time for profit sharing, we take as much as we need and focus on developing the business. In addition to the grocery store, we are planning to open a computer centre to assist people and students in giving essential training on computer literacy," said Monika Baroi, an entrepreneur from another Pipradanga WBC.

Alongside visiting the women entrepreneurs, a workshop and seminar was held on "The role of Women Business Centre for women economic empowerment including social protection" at Upazila Complex Auditorium, Tungipara, with participation of around 50 stakeholders including WBC entrepreneurs from Khulna, Bagerhat, and Gopalganj among other places. Tungipara UNO Md Al Mamun was the special guest and Sahida Sultana, DC of Gopalganj was the chief guest.

By Feda Al Hossain
Photo: Coca Cola Foundation

#DECOR

Tilottoma presents a one-stop solution for your home

The year is 2022 and we find ourselves constantly on the lookout for something functional and unique for our homes. The biggest challenge, however, is to run around the city looking for the perfect products that fit our choice and budget. Tilottoma brings an end to our worries once and for all.

While their outlet in Gulshan 1 is exclusively dedicated to My Kitchen with its modern kitchen appliances, Tilottoma has brought the best of all of its products under one roof at Gulshan 2. Starting from tiles, sanitary and kitchenware, and interior appliances, this brand never fails to amaze with their innovative methods and forward thinking.

For many of us, the best way to start a day or unwind at the end of it is by taking a good shower. With Tilottoma, you can choose to make your showers a soothing escape from all the unpleasantness of the day. Their hydrotherapy shower sets are built to focus on different parts of the body, complete with multiple sprays and speed.

The Aqua Moon by Dornbracht for instance, is a dome-shaped shower replicating the moon, with water-jets built inside. With different modes you can experience a massage, a rain, or a curtain



effect, while the water pattern pleases your eyes. The temperature of the water can be adjusted and locked with the push of a button.

The Comfort Shower by Dornbracht is another step ahead as it completely eliminates the need to be on foot while showering. While a two-in-one overhead shower can be used to wash your hair and body alternatively or together, three panels pour water on your back in a waterfall-effect.

The most attractive part for this is the leg shower that can wash away any dirt and debris with intense yet very soothing water sprays.

Tilottoma is the official distributor of Toto, a Japanese brand famous for their innovation, health and hygiene standards

all over the world.

The outlet also dedicates a portion to My Kitchen, complete with built-in stove, oven, refrigerator, and more. The cabinets with pull-down features allow everything to be stored within the hand's reach while spacious and smooth drawers help save a tremendous amount of time in your cooking.

These cabinets are 72-hour acid and salt



tested. So, once this is set up at home, you can basically forget about rust as long as it is maintained regularly. Tilottoma also provides free maintenance service every 6 months, for 2 years.

Tilottoma has earned an esteemed position in the market for tiles in Bangladesh. It is the distributor for more than a hundred brands of tiles originating

from Spain, Indonesia, Malaysia, Italy, etc. holding perhaps the biggest variety of tiles under one roof. If you are a fan of aesthetics in your house interior, tiles with a wooden finish are bound to catch your eye.

In conversation with us, Mahmud Riyad Hassan, DGM of Marketing, shared how their aim here is to be an overall experience for customers and not just another selling unit. "The reason we have a fully functioning live fittings, kitchen, and mock washrooms is to show you what it would feel to have something like this at home," he stated.

Adding further to this, Hassan said, "We want Tilottoma Gulshan Showroom to become a meeting place for design professionals, architects and consumers alike, where they can spend quality time, turn their imagination into reality and get all the necessary brand solution under one roof."

Essentials:

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Photo: Tilottoma