



# SKS Foundation

## 35<sup>th</sup>

# Founding Anniversary



### SKS Foundation

Special Supplement1<sup>st</sup> December 2022



### Greetings from the Chairperson

Today is the 35<sup>th</sup> Founding Anniversary of SKS Foundation. On this occasion, I would like to greet and congratulate all concerned with SKS Foundation. I also would like to pay my special gratitude to the development planners & practitioners whose tireless engagement has transformed & enriched SKS' profile & philosophy over the three & half decades.

Based on its 35-year development experiences & learning, SKS Foundation is opening a new chapter of its journey. I, being part of this development journey, feel especially happy that SKS has been contributing significantly through its innovative approaches and specialized services. It's also significant that SKS has been able to retain the trust of the government and development partners, and particularly its program participants at the grassroots. The working scope of SKS is being expanded, and new working areas are being adjoined. SKS has been playing a unique role in agriculture, food security, education, women empowerment & child rights, environment conservation & disaster management, health & WASH, and other development domains to ensure participation and protect the rights of the marginalized.

Centering its excellence in promotion of development services, SKS Foundation has earned huge recognition at local & national levels. On behalf of the policy formulating body of the Organization, I would like to take the opportunity to mention that credit goes to the program participants, development partners, policy-makers and stakeholders who are supporting SKS throughout its development drive.

SKS Foundation will move forward based on its pragmatic planning and program while a sustainable change in society will remain its cherished goal. As a development partner, it will emerge with new development spheres. I believe, SKS Foundation will be able to continue its contribution to the socio-economic development of the country through the implementation of its multifaceted development programs and will play a strong role in achieving the SDGs.

My greetings and request to all concerned to continue supporting SKS Foundation in the days to come.

Md. Ayub Ali  
Chairperson  
SKS Foundation

## SKS Foundation

### Vision

A poverty-free society where everyone has access to resources and live with voice, dignity and justice.

### Mission Statement

SKS Foundation facilitates improvement of life and livelihood of the poor and excluded by reducing their vulnerabilities, promoting empowerment and improving access to development opportunities and resources. SKS Foundation collaborates with government including local government, private sector, NGOs, networks and donors to ensure sustainable development.

### Goal

Quality of life of the poor and excluded groups improved with access to and use of effective and inclusive development opportunity and resources.

### Core Values



## Thirty Five Years of SKS Foundation – A Great Institutional Journey

### Introduction

It is a great pleasure to celebrate the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SKS Foundation taking on board its participants, promoters and patronizers. SKS is thankful to all stakeholders for holding it responsible and committed to its vision, mission and core values during this period. SKS Foundation is a mid-size non-government development organization with three mainstream program deeply rooted in Northern Bangladesh. On 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022, SKS observes 35 years of relentless journey for development, started by a small group of volunteers to help a neglected population in an unprecedented flood emergency. The place is a flood-prone area with a high concentration of poverty and deprivation. The journey, this article refers to, was not only to deal with emergency, deprivation and poverty but also to deal with the transformation of voluntary work into a vibrant entity. It has been a great institutional journey that transformed SKS Foundation from a mere community-based organization to a national-level NGO of multi-disciplinary works. It sets out an alluring example of institutional attainment with dedicated leadership. Starting from community-based informal voluntary initiatives, SKS now works with a multi-disciplinary approach to help vulnerable groups including char dwellers, ethnic minorities, landless and marginal farmers who suffer from exclusion and lack access to development resources. SKS has grown progressively through learning by doing over the last three decades and managed to fold out slowly with diversity and institutional thinking. On the eve of celebrating its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, SKS is pleased to reflect on the experiences & learning centring its institutional journey.

### Brief History

Historically, SKS Foundation germinated from an informal community-based group. It was conceived in the mid-eighties out of voluntary initiatives run by a group of self-motivated local youths who came together to help poor and marginalized families in isolated chars (riverine islands) in Gaibandha in Northern Bangladesh, especially during the flood. The impact of the work on the lives & livelihood of the people and communities made the volunteers ambitious to form an organization and continue with the social work. It was formally established as Samaj Kallyan Sangstha (SKS) on 1st December 1987. The experience of the volunteers and the supportive atmosphere of social work keep them intact and self-engaging with SKS and community development. They were merely compensated with subsidized food and travel. Capitalizing on the strength of the volunteers, the group managed to pursue local contributions and continue the work. They were slowly reaching out, with limited resources, to the equally deserving population on the mainland to help them fight against poverty, inequality and injustice. The journey had never been easy, smooth and homogeneous. History of struggles, dedications and personal sacrifices of the founder volunteers were behind it. Contributions in cash and kind provided by themselves and collected locally from like-minded well-off families were the main inspiration for them to fight against flood vulnerability, hunger and deprivation of the poor and disadvantaged population. Rasel Ahmed Liton of Bharatkali, Gaibandha was the man who took the lead in navigating this great journey of voluntarism to its present destination of a national-level entity. He was passionately supported by self-motivated local youths, without whom, SKS Foundation wouldn't have existed as it is today.

### Journey with Development Program

Since the early nineties, SKS Foundation was visible as a national-level NGO like many others and started exploring partnerships with UN organizations, INGOs and Government agencies to implement development projects of mutual interests. There was no definite strategic plan for the organisation at that time. It was more like approaching an opportunity with a given project and matching up with the funding conditions of the donors. Starting with the said approach, there were some great experiences of partnership that were, in the true sense, very symbiotic and continued over a long period. SKS gratefully acknowledges those partnerships and donors accompanying the journey with long-term projects/programs and commitments. Some project partnerships are still agile with new and revised development agendas. SKS feels proud of being associated with them. Over the years, SKS has been able to create more spaces for consultation with resource partners before any partnership is signed up. It was possible because of the trust and confidence demonstrated by SKS in the last three decades. At present, SKS is happily managing an average of 30-35 partnership projects at any time. The number even goes up at the time with more overseas development grants in the country. It is absolutely the donors, government, UN agencies and INGOs in Bangladesh that made it possible for SKS to implement hundreds of projects meant for addressing underlying causes of poverty, inequality and injustice. The partnership projects were extremely useful to raise SKS's institutional credibility, capacity and confidence. Without these project opportunities, SKS's journey would have been incomplete and difficult.

### Journey with Microfinance Program

Attaining a formal identity in the late eighties created ample opportunities for SKS to involve in multi-sectoral development work. At that time, microfinance was one of the promising felt-need avenues that NGOs were generally taking up to address rural poverty through self-employment generation. With such a given opportunity, SKS embarked on Microfinance (MF) program in 1992 and later became a PKSF partner in 1997. Though it was a late entry compared to other NGOs; SKS managed to catch up with the pace of the program to come closer to the top 15 Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) in Bangladesh as of 2021. The initial focus of the program on rural poverty was extended in early 2000 to cover urban and peri-urban poverty in the program. This was necessary due to the growth in the low-income urban population (rural-urban migration) attracted by the growing concentration of income opportunities in the cities. The first few years after inception was a learning phase for the organization when SKS respectfully learned from other NGOs and adapted to its situation. Conceptually, SKS started its microfinance program with a three-spike objective: i) self-employment, ii) poverty reduction, and iii) women empowerment. At present, SKS' microfinance program is serving more than 200,000 program participants (95% women) through more than 200 branches across 26 districts. Apart from financial service delivery, SKS runs a number of social welfare and human development activities for the family members of the program participants with a special focus on children and elderly people. The activities are entirely financed by SKS' own fund. The program created enough opportunities for women leadership development through small business enterprises. Management leadership evolved from within the program over the last 15 years and is spirited enough to lead the program to the next level of professionalism.

### Journey with Social Enterprises

With the growing pace of the organizational journey with multiple projects and programs, SKS felt internally the need for strategic thinking to make the best utilization of opportunities and resources. Since 2004, SKS Foundation has been drawing up a strategic plan for the organization, each being for five years. The current one is the 4th consecutive plan that is due to be over in June 2024. Moving onto the systematic planning process in early 2000 was a critical time for the organization to think strategically in response to the growing needs and opportunities alongside the demands that were emanating from the constituencies. With a certain level of confidence, SKS calculated the risks and the costs of doing and not doing enterprises. Finally, the top leadership of the organization, with support from the governing body, stepped up to wider institutional thinking. After careful examinations of the risks and opportunities, SKS initiated a few social businesses- primarily in the health, education and hospitality sector. Initially, the journey with social enterprises was not as smooth as it was deemed to be, due to many limiting factors and a lack of experience. The journey started getting smoother and set on track with consistent efforts from the top management and good advice from the stakeholders and friends from the wider NGO community. As the journey kept on moving, the business portfolio kept on growing in terms of concentration, number and array. As of now, the list includes nine enterprises including community radio, print and publication media. All businesses were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to a large extent. However, with post-Covid special efforts and recovery support from the parent SKS, most of the businesses are nearly back on track.

### Journey with Advocacy & Influencing

Engagement with advocacy and influencing agenda was a late addition to SKS' organizational journey. After two decades of consolidation of field experiences, the brand identity of the organization empowered SKS Foundation to take a role in transformative development. SKS moved on to policy advocacy work and directed some dedicated efforts and resources towards that end. Since 2008, SKS was more or less visible with its' advocacy and influencing work through mobilizing organizational capacity and joining the NGO and CSO networks and alliances in the country and the South Asia region on issues relevant to SKS mandate. Initially, the membership entry with various platforms and alliances was more like a learning opportunity for SKS. The opportunities were used optimally to contribute effectively to the policy advocacy agenda. SKS's advocacy approach is parallelly focused on national-to-regional issues and grassroots problems. At present, SKS is active with 33 advocacy forums. Apart from policy advocacy, SKS has painted, over the last 20 years, a good length of footprints of local advocacy together with community groups and CBOs. The purpose was to fight locally against the denial of rights and ensure justice for the victims. The journey with grassroots advocacy settled hundreds of cases of violation and injustice in the local communities in the last twenty years. With proper counting, the number of cases may even go up. The outcome of local advocacy is visualized with improvement in various social indicators in the communities including the incidence of child marriage, polygamy, dowry, WASH coverage, wage discrimination, advance sale of labor and so on in SKS working areas.



### Greetings from the Chief Executive

SKS Foundation was the effort of a group of youth who dreamed to empower society. The dream is now a reality. There was every attempt to extinguish that dream in various ways. The oppressors of society couldn't accept the initiative of social change from a backward village Bharatkali of Gaibandha. Being committed & steady, we continued to achieve the goal without hesitation. Until today, SKS remains committed to establishing a poverty-free, educated, and just society by creating dignity, justice, freedom of speech, right to education, and employment. SKS Foundation has gradually emerged as a national non-government organization by working with strong persuasion, relentless hard-work, and integrity defying adversity.

Over time, SKS Foundation continued the battle to restore the rights of the marginalized & excluded people making them socially dignified and economically solvent. SKS has extended its scope, expanded program participants and the geographical areas parallelly. Presently it exists in 134 upazilas of 26 districts under 6 divisions in Bangladesh while reaching around 4.5 million people for protecting their lives and social rights. The marginalized people have become confident in moving forward. Though a long way forward to go.

Based on its running 5-year Strategic Plan, SKS Foundation promotes and implements its development initiatives under the 4 mainstream sectors- Social Empowerment, Economic Development, Environmental Justice, and Social Enterprising targeting to contribute to the achievement of several goals under the SDGs. Due to the climate change challenges, ensuring food, shelter, education, and health for vulnerable people will be a future development challenge. We need to focus on the protection and preservation of the environment and food security. Overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is now facing an unrest situation. SKS is actively monitoring the situation and remaining committed to working with deserving people and sustaining the organization's journey ahead.

SKS Foundation is grateful for the cooperation of the government, national & international development organizations, private organizations, media, civil society, and especially the participation of the program participants and the workforce who always keep SKS vibrant in the development journey.

Our special thanks & greetings to all the valued stakeholders on SKS Foundation's special day. We look forward to your cooperation on SKS' journey ahead.

Rasel Ahmed Liton  
Founder & Chief Executive  
SKS Foundation

### Conclusion

Accumulated achievements of three and a half decades, both at the program and institutional level, branded SKS Foundation as a self-styled NGO. With a good mix of success and failure, SKS Foundation has been able to extend its operation with development projects, microfinance programs and social enterprises in the greater north and a few other regions including coastal belt, drought-prone areas and urban low-income settings. This was helpful not only to raise institutional image and synergy but also to reach out to a diverse group of the population especially women and adolescent girls. At present, SKS is agile in 25 districts across five Divisions. As of now, it has cumulatively served more than 4.5 million population with multiple interventions and frequency.

The current Strategic Plan (2019 – 2024) of SKS Foundation resonates with progressive thinking in its development program and approach. The strategy is committed to reinforcing the focus and priorities, building on the critical strengths that are instrumental in meeting future challenges, and drawing on the lessons learned from the past and adapting. In fact, the strategic growth paradigm of SKS Foundation is still in progress and has a long distance to travel. The institutional journey of SKS Foundation over the last 35 years has been an evolutionary experience. The journey stresses learning, improvement, consolidation, expansion and continuation of good works and avoiding repetition of mistakes. SKS, with its able leadership, is committed to reach-out new frontiers and priorities in the years to come in an effective and efficient manner.

SKS Foundation works very closely to the doorsteps of the people for whom it works. Over the last 35 years, it has been rooted with unique core values and is proud to have contributed to several MDGs in the past and with ongoing program contribution to at least 10 out of 17 SDGs at present. SKS Foundation respectfully acknowledges all the support and collaborations including contributions beyond financial resources from the government, development partners, CSO networks and communities that made its journey possible and memorable for the SKS family.

Imrul Kayes Muniruzzaman, Ph.D.  
Deputy Chief Executive, SKS Foundation