

Building banking relationships that support local enterprise

S M MAINUL KABIR — SBAC Bank PLC

Opening an account can give an entrepreneur a foothold in formal banking, but accessing finance requires reliable records and repayment capacity. In a conversation with The Daily Star, S M Mainul Kabir, managing director and CEO of South Bangla Agriculture and Commerce Bank PLC (SBAC), discusses how agent banking can help customers make that transition.

THE DAILY STAR (TDS): How is agent banking supporting local enterprise?

S M MAINUL KABIR (SMMK): Beyond transactions, agent banking can help entrepreneurs build financial records, develop savings discipline and establish banking relationships. Previously unbanked people in rural and underserved areas are entering the formal system.

Our outlet in Dhankhali, near the Sundarbans in Shyamnagar, Satkhira, illustrates this potential. People who never held accounts are accessing banking.

TDS: What can entrepreneurs do at outlets, and how do they apply for finance?

SMMK: Available services include account opening, deposits, withdrawals, remittance receipts and routine transactions, subject to regulations. Agents provide initial guidance and refer prospective borrowers to branches or lending teams; credit assessment and approval follow authorised bank processes.

Applicants select a suitable product and submit documents that may include a national identity card, trade licence, business records, bank statements, income evidence and applicable security papers. Processing time depends on application completeness, business viability, verification, risk assessment and approval procedures.

> **Turning financial access into productive enterprise growth requires sustained engagement and responsible lending.**
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> **S M Mainul Kabir**
> Managing Director and CEO
> SBAC Bank PLC

TDS: How do you assess enterprises with limited records and match finance to their needs?

SMMK: Limited documentation should not automatically prevent consideration of a viable enterprise. Where product and regulatory frameworks permit, assessment may consider cash flow, operating history, repayment capacity, market prospects and risk. Savings behaviour, remittances and transaction histories provide supplementary evidence.

Working capital may support inventory and operating expenses; term finance may fund equipment or expansion. Loan sizes and repayments should reflect verified cash flows, seasonality and product terms.

TDS: What would improve women entrepreneurs' access?

SMMK: Barriers include limited financial literacy, inadequate records, lack of acceptable collateral, mobility constraints and low awareness of financing options. Progress requires awareness-building, customer guidance, better documentation and fair, transparent assessment, alongside financing suited to viable women-led enterprises.

TDS: How should customers be protected?

SMMK: Customers should receive clear information on charges, financing terms, eligibility and application status through authorised channels. Monitoring, compliance checks and risk-based supervision help identify irregularities. Misleading information, unauthorised charges or service problems should be reported promptly through official complaint channels or the responsible branch.



Looking beyond formal records to assess small businesses

SYED MIZANUR RAHMAN — Meghna Bank PLC

Many small businesses operate mainly in cash, making formal financial records difficult to produce when seeking credit. In a conversation with The Daily Star, Syed Mizanur Rahman, managing director of Meghna Bank PLC, discusses how agent outlets can connect these enterprises with finance while building customer trust and supporting women's participation.

THE DAILY STAR (TDS): What services can entrepreneurs access, and where does an agent's responsibility end?

SYED MIZANUR RAHMAN (SMR): Outlets offer account opening, deposits, withdrawals, transfers, remittance disbursement, utility bill payments and government payments through A-Challan.

Agents identify prospective borrowers, collect applications and check initial documentation. The bank handles credit assessment, approval and disbursement. Agents also maintain contact with borrowers and facilitate repayments, combining local knowledge with bank oversight.

TDS: What should applicants prepare, and how long can financing take?

SMR: Applicants generally need a national identity card, photographs, trade licence, TIN where applicable, bank statements and relevant business documents. Credit teams review turnover, cash flow, inventory, liabilities and credit history.

A straightforward unsecured application may take approximately three to five working days, subject to complete documentation and satisfactory assessment. Secured financing may need additional time for valuation, legal checks and higher-level approvals. Loan amounts and repayment schedules reflect business needs, cash flow and repayment capacity.

> **We believe financial empowerment begins with awareness and trust.**
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> **Syed Mizanur Rahman**
> Managing Director
> Meghna Bank PLC

TDS: Can businesses without formal bank statements be considered?

SMR: We consider proposals without formal bank statements where the business is legitimate and its existence, operations, cash flow and repayment capacity can be verified. Where applicable, mobile financial services transaction records provide supporting evidence.

The aim is to assess the actual business and its financial capacity while maintaining appropriate credit standards. Small business financing through our outlets also includes facilities under Bangladesh Bank-supported refinance schemes.

TDS: How are you addressing barriers facing women entrepreneurs?

SMR: Financial literacy programmes, community workshops and courtyard meetings help explain services, savings, financial security and responsible borrowing. Gaps remain in digital awareness and documentation. Building confidence in banking is an essential first step.

TDS: How do you protect customers and maintain trust?

SMR: Outlets display approved charges and service contacts. Customers receive information through SMS, branches, representatives and our round-the-clock toll-free contact centre. We explain biometric authentication, system-generated receipts and official SMS alerts, and warn against sharing PINs or passwords. Complaints can be reported through branches or the contact centre.

Reliable, financially capable agents and sustainable outlet businesses are essential. Misconduct or service failures can undermine wider banking confidence.



