

# JOBS

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR BANGLADESH

# Newsletter

Special Edition

*JOBS Activities in Khulna and the South-Western Region*

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## Director's Message

Dear Partners,

*I am pleased to oversee the participation of JOBS at America Week in Khulna, and share the stories of our work in the region.*

*To date, JOBS Project funded by USAID Bangladesh and implemented by the IRIS Center at the University of Maryland, has developed over 10 business sectors, formed over 100 clusters with backward support linkages to the larger export companies, documented around \$110 million in export sales, assisted 80,000 MEs with 90% of the clients being women. In recent years, the new sectors like PPE and handmade paper has created 5,000 new jobs all over Bangladesh through JOBS' assistance.*

As you can see from the following pages, JOBS places special emphasis on assisting small and medium entrepreneurs through skill development training, facilitating linkages between producers, lead buyers, and exporters, and public recognition of the success of our clients. These activities are a testament to JOBS' belief that small entrepreneurs in all regions of Bangladesh will be the driving force behind the country's development.

JOBS' results-oriented approach recognizes that a region should not be dependent on only one product or service; you should not put all of your eggs in one basket. That is why our organization has been instrumental in identifying and implementing development activities in a diversified range of sectors. In Khulna, this includes handicrafts, jute and fabric products, handmade shoes, leather goods, home textile products, and electronics. In each of these areas, JOBS has helped create new employment opportunities, increased earnings, and developed a skilled manpower base to further expand the sectors.

## A Shining Face

She was just another Bangladeshi housewife who started making dresses as a hobby in 1994. Dil Afsana Akhi, now an established entrepreneur, used to sell those dresses to friends, relatives and neighbors. As the dresses proved hugely popular within a short time, Akhi started a dress-making business in 1995, encouraged by her husband, with a capital of 50,000 taka. She traded successfully from her house for eight years, to local shops and consumes, until she decided to expand the business at the end of 2002 & established Rang Dhanu, a garments, block-batik, and embroidery center in Khulna, located in the southern part of Bangladesh. She employed 20 full-time and 25 part-time staff and relocated the business from her home to a rented showroom in the commercial area of Khan Jahan Ali Road, Khulna.

During the last week of December 2003 Akhi participated in Entrepreneurship Development and Business Management (EDBM) Training, developed and provided by JOBS/USAID Project. By the end of the course she was skilled in a multitude of areas including business selection, market surveys, depreciation calculation and costing; which are very much required to maintain a business like Akhi's.

The training equipped her with the business knowledge to visualize the most beneficial futuristic steps for her company. She has since extended the business by opening two more showrooms at Khulna and Kishorgonj District, creating 2 more full-time employment positions and 25 part-time positions. Her capital has increased from 200,000 taka before the training to 500,000 taka after expansion.

Akhi has used her newly developed expertise to become a lead buyer for 10 more enterprises in her commanding areas, providing them with training, marketing assistance and advice. Her natural flair for innovative thinking was given a focus and direction by the training, which she has since capitalized on through an enhanced marketing strategy. As well as selling products from her showroom, she now sells to schools and colleges using on-site presentations, and supplies other showrooms in surrounding district level towns.

EDBM training provided Dil Afsana Akhi with the confidence to construct business decisions in a long-term context and the skills necessary to implement them. The result has been an outstanding success for her. Recently she acknowledged the assistance provided by JOBS/USAID Project for Rang Dhanu in her promotional brochure. ■



Dil Afsana Akhi (in the middle wearing yellow saree) during a market survey interview at her showroom in Khulna.

# JOBS' Training brings Sustainable Employment to Semiskilled Entrepreneurs

Liberty Shoes, a traditional hand made shoe producer and wholesaler located in Narail, has distributed its products made by shoe artisans scattered throughout Narail district to domestic markets in Narail, Jessore, Magura and Khulna. Recently the firm was unable to take large consignments since it often faced problems procuring quality shoes/sandals (in terms of design and finishing) because its entrepreneurs were not skilled in producing new designs and quality products preferred by the consumers.

In this circumstance Liberty Shoes, with the help of JOBS,



Training on process in the Narail handmade paper footwear samity.

formed a cluster of 25 producers to solve the aforesaid problem, now known as the Narail Handmade Footwear Samity, Narail. In December 2002, JOBS provided assistance for three-month long skill development training focused on developing new designs and improving product quality to enhance the entrepreneur's skill in shoe/sandal production. After receiving the training, these entrepreneurs were able to make quality shoes/sandals and market their products according to market demand and at significantly higher prices to urban outlets. They are now ensured a good source of income. As a result of JOBS' work with these semiskilled individuals, the handmade shoe cluster in Narail is now sustainable and has created new employment opportunities. ■



In the Khulna Leather cluster trainees are being trained to print on leather.

## Leather Goods for European & Japanese Market

The importance of the export oriented footwear sector cannot be overstated as the year 2005 approached when Bangladesh is not going to enjoy the quota benefits from the garments sector anymore. But as all the major raw materials of the export oriented leather goods sector can be sourced locally, it can turn into another booming sector like RMG (Readymade Garments) in Bangladesh. Footwear had been one of the leading export earners of Bangladesh. Because of few major advantages like quality leather supply and low cost labor many new entrepreneurs came in this industry in recent years and the existing are getting many new businesses.

RMM International has been a leading finished leather supplier of Bangladesh for quite some time. RMM has supplied 12% of the total leather export from Bangladesh last year. Due to factors like value addition, big profit margin and demand of leather footwear and leather goods, RMM has started a new unit on mesh sheet, hand made leather goods, shoe upper and footwear production recently. **Currently about 200 people are getting trained in this unit and JOBS is facilitating training for 80 unskilled workers in Hazaribag Cluster. During the production, the unit faced tremendous demand and was unable to cope with the workload. At that time, JOBS and RMM Leather Industries Ltd. decided to open a new cluster in Singair in Manikganj where 100 unskilled workers have been trained to meet the huge demand. After that, JOBS and RMM Ltd. also developed two clusters in Syedpur and Khulna where 80 and 250 unskilled workers have been trained. The workers in the cluster are earning a monthly salary of Tk. 2,500-3,000 depending on their skills.** To bring orders for these trainees and to make this unit profitable and contributor in the country's export earning, RMM will participate in major fairs all over Europe in the coming season and in Japan in next October. ■

## Home Textile in South-Western Region



Product developed in south-western region of Bangladesh displayed at an international trade fair.

As the Multi Fiber Agreement came to an end at the start of 2005, the Bangladeshi garments industry will be facing significant challenges while also creating new opportunities.

Bangladesh was traditionally known for jute and tea exports, but during the past two decades she has attracted world-wide attention for ready made garment products. Recently the country has gained renown for its home textile sector. The potential of the home textile sector lies in every step of the production process, which is done in the local factory. Only cotton is imported from abroad. Yarn, fabric, and the finished product are produced locally under the supervision of the same management, making it easier to maintain the quality and uniqueness of the finished product. The home textile sector comprises bed sets, curtains, cushion covers, table linen, and any home decorative made of textiles. Bangladesh recently started exporting home textile items to different countries, and the export percentage is steadily increasing.

Having already identified home textile as a thrust sector for Bangladesh, JOBS facilitated many of its textile manufacturers and handicrafts clients to enter this sector. Specifically, in the southern region of Bangladesh, JOBS found there was a demand for vegetable-dyed products, though few knew how to take advantage of the opportunity. The entrepreneurs from the southern region who were involved in handloom/handicrafts and textiles needed training. JOBS designed a training program to develop their skills in vegetable dyeing and natural block printing. The promotion of these items among wholesalers, buyers, and producers was emphasized. An exhibition of vegetable – dyed items was also organized to raise awareness and promote the ecological benefits of this process, which is in high demand in the international market.

Following the completion of training, the team provides marketing support. Existing marketing options are explored and steps taken to promote the products. An important aspect of the training program was the promotion of clients

in export markets. Often local markets are unable to absorb the numbers produced and it is vital for producers to access other markets. To prepare entrepreneurs for the international arena, JOBS arranges for training as well. Based on the specific needs of different markets, various types of training are provided. ■

## Turning the Lights on for the Electricians

Under SME assistance, JOBS provides technical support to the electrical and electronic sub sectors. JOBS conducted a baseline survey to find out the potential and export growth of this sector. JOBS observed that: 1) This sector is experiencing a severe crisis of skilled workers in manual as well as mechanized production, 2) Engineers in Bangladesh work less in private companies and more in government positions even though the pay is less because of less job security and difficulty in switching to other private companies, 3) Technicians, who are directly involved in all technical aspects at the first stage, are not valued as professionals and thus, get no recognition by the people. Against this background, JOBS decided to train workers on the basic know-how of the electrical sector, including what they should use for safety measurement, quality products, cables, meters, etc., and add their contribution in introducing our local quality products to the users.

JOBS has taken quite an effort to decipher the problem of unskilled manpower in the electrical sector. To continue with their effort, they provided training to 28 electricians, held by an experienced local trainer in association with **ENERGYPAC, Khulna**. The objective was to develop their skills in different aspects of low voltage electrical and electronic (E & E) requisites that will ultimately create a better employment opportunity through increasing efficiency for these electricians. **A total of 10 such training programs took place in Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chittagong, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar, and Khulna, where 286 electricians have been trained so far. Out of these 286 electricians, 20 have found employment in the Middle East.**

JOBS also assisted ENERGYPAC to participate in the Spring Fair in Dubai, 2003 **where they generated US\$ 60,000 out of negotiated orders.** ■



Training on process in Khulna for the electricians in association with Khulna Electricians Association and EnergyPac.

# JOBS Partners with AAMUS to Assist the Entrepreneurs in South-Western Region

Ashar Alo Mohila Unnayan Sangstha (AAMUS), a local NGO of Narail district, started its journey with an objective to help the poor people of its working area in the south-western part of Bangladesh for sustainable socio-economic development. It has been involved in various integrated development activities, including enterprise development, Non Formal Primary Education (NFPE), environmental development, sanitation, and training programs for its beneficiaries since 1995. It has been supplying handicraft items to local markets for the last 7 years. They usually procure goods produced by their enlisted entrepreneurs. AAMUS major buyers include Heed Handicrafts and Karupalli in Dhaka. Heed Handicrafts exports AAMUS handicraft items to overseas markets, but are often unable to meet the desired standards for buyers and loose orders. In this situation they decided to organize clusters to develop the skills of producers for future orders and accordingly sought JOBS assistance. With JOBS' assistance, Ashar Alo developed two potential clusters of jute and fabric products consisting of 50 entrepreneurs of its economic interest.

Jute and fabric products, which include cushion covers, kitchen wears, wall mats, embroidered sharees, decoration pieces, bed covers, baby and ladies wear, curtains etc. have been produced by Ashar Alo since its inception. However, the product quality and designs had begun to deteriorate because of a shortage of skilled artisans. As a result, price and demand were declining both in local and international markets. In November 2002 and March 2003, JOBS accordingly initiated two-month long and three-month long skill development training courses for 50 semiskilled women of the handicraft cluster members of AAMUS at Narail. The training focused on developing new designs and improving the quality of their products. After the training these entrepreneurs were able to market their products at significantly higher prices to urban outlets and to some foreign countries through buyers. They are now ensured a good source of income and full-time employment in a traditional sector, thanks to training that improved their skills and trained them how to be attentive to the preferences of today's consumers. ■



Women working on fabrics during a skill development training facilitated by JOBS.



Products of Ashar Alo Jute products displayed after JOBS' Skill Development Training.

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