

JOBS

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR BANGLADESH

Newsletter

Special Edition

JOBS activities in Rajshahi and the greater northern region

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Director's Message

Dear partners,

Greetings! This edition of the newsletter focuses on some of JOBS activities in the greater Rajshahi division.

JOBS is a USAID funded project implemented by the IRIS Center at the University of Maryland, aimed at creating sustainable employment by helping small, micro, and medium entrepreneurs grow their enterprises. JOBS looks into developing opportunities in areas which diversify the production and export base. The approach depends heavily on identifying productive sectors with the potential to grow in export and domestic markets. The program looks beyond current sectors and seeks to identify entrepreneurs with the attitude and aptitude to move their businesses to the next level of growth.

JOBS is achieving results on a number of fronts. The program has developed over 10 business sectors such as leather goods, handmade paper and stationery, handmade floor coverings, personal protective equipment, and light electrical products, to name a few. In addition, over 80 clusters with backward support linkages to the larger export companies have been formed. Since 2000, export sales of assisted clients reached to \$52 million. Firms receiving support have grown and added 5,000 jobs, with eighty percent of the positions have gone to women.

As this material will show you, Rajshahi offers many opportunities for business decisions of producing myriad products - both for exports and local consumption. Let us continue to work together to expand the product lines & creating opportunities for Rajshahi. — A. Imran Shauket



Imran Shauket, Asif U. Ahmed, Erika Hoffman - Kiess visiting BBRL factory.

Local Products Gain Int'l Market after JOBS' Training

Although its sonorous name may make Thanapara, Swallows sound like a group of aspiring poets, it is in fact an entrepreneurial organization founded in 1972 that focuses on weaving, embroidery, and sewing. Recently, JOBS partnered with Thanapara, Swallows in two development programs in their areas of interest.



Women working in Thanapara, Swallows stitching room.

Lambs' wool carpets are likely candidates for a development program for a number of reasons. Producing the carpets is a labor intensive endeavor that can provide employment for many people, and the hand-crafted, exotic nature of the prayer rugs, blankets, floor coverings, and carpets they produce make them attractive export commodities. The workers making these lambs' wool products are concentrated in Noagola, but until recently the lack of individual and organizational support in the area has prevented them from developing the sector to its full potential. JOBS provided skill development training for 25 entrepreneurs in the Noagola cluster from December to March 2003. As a result of this training, the workers are now able to product higher quality products, and their incomes have risen accordingly.

The second joint Thanapara, Swallows/JOBS joint endeavor is with the Sardah Block Batik cluster in the area of Rajshahi. In an effort to launch a new product line, Swallows introduced block and screen printed fabrics to its women entrepreneurs in the area in late 2002. JOBS provided intensive training on block batik and screen printing techniques for 30 of these women from October 2002 to January 2003. Thanapara, Swallows assisted in the creation of market linkages between these entrepreneurs and buyers, as a result of which the block printed fabrics they produce are not only continuing to sell well in local markets, but are gaining market acceptance in Japan and Europe as well. ■



An innovative USAID initiative implemented by the IRIS Center at University of Maryland.



JOBS Partners with TMSS to Provide Training to Workers in Northern Region

Thengamara Mohila Sabuj Sangha (TMSS) is a domestic NGO that has been involved in a wide variety of enterprise development activities, including weaving, home textiles, handicrafts, and agro-based products, in Rajshahi Division for the last 20 years. Recently, TMSS expanded its program into the Dhaka and Chittagong Divisions and, in partnership with JOBS, began assisting three promising new areas of economic interest.

Palm Fiber Crafts

Palm fiber crafts, which include hats, baskets, lamps, and gift boxes, have been produced in Bangladesh for many years. Recently, however, product quality and designs had begun to diminish because of a shortage of skilled artisans. As a result, prices were falling and fewer markets were interested in carrying the items. In September 2002 JOBS initiated a month-long skill development training course for 25 semiskilled women of the Shilkoir Hostashipa Mohila Samitte Cluster in Kahalu, Bogra. The training focused on developing new designs and improving the quality of their palm fiber products. After the training, these women were able to market their products, at significantly higher prices, to urban outlets in Bangladesh and to some foreign countries. They are now ensured a good source of income and fulltime employment in a traditional sector that had been languishing, thanks to training that improved their skills and taught them how to be attentive to the preferences of today's consumers.

Woolen Garments

The Kochashohor Knitwear Cluster is a TMSS client that produces woolen products, including sweaters, scarves, mufflers, and socks, in Gobindagong in Gaibandha district. This sector also faced problems of a shortage of skilled



JOBS facilitated skill development training on knitwear products.

workers, a lack of innovative designs, and diminished product quality. In the summer of 2003, JOBS provided a two-month long skill development training course for 25 semiskilled workers that focused on improving designs, color choices, and the overall quality of their products. After their training, these entrepreneurs were also able to expand the market for their products among urban consumers in Dhaka, Bogra, and Narayanganj; they have been able to raise their prices, increase their sales, ensure their own employment, and create more jobs for new workers. ■

JOBS Training in Livestock Management ensures more income for People of Char Lands

Residents of char lands of the Brahmaputra and Teesta river basins in Gaibandha district long attempted to raise cattle, but because of their insufficient knowledge and skills in



JOBS facilitated training on livestock management.

livestock rearing and a lack of support from the public sector, until recently they were unable to realize much benefit from their efforts. JOBS identified the need for skill development in livestock rearing in the area and recently provided a 15-day training course that focused on cow fattening, providing vaccinations and monitoring the health of their herds, achieving efficient milk management, and enhancing the productivity of the local cattle varieties. The training was given to 30 entrepreneurs in Uria union of Fulchhari upazila in Gaibandha district in the summer of 2003.

As a result of this training, the entrepreneurs have secured credit from Gono Unnyan Kendra (GUK), a domestic NGO that has worked with disadvantaged people living on char lands of the since 1984. GUK's development programs focus on access to credit, education, relief activities, enterprise development, and vegetable gardening.

The char land residents have also increased the milk production of their herds. Their animals have increased the size and the mortality rate is lower because of their efforts to provide vaccinations and monitor the health of the animals. They have achieved market predominance locally and can generate a sustainable livelihood from their livestock. JOBS' training efforts have ensured a good source of income year around for the people of this region. ■

JOBS' Training Partnerships with BRAC Brings Sustainable Employment to Unskilled Women



Training session going on Nilphamari shoe cluster.

BRAC is one of the leading NGOs in Bangladesh, and the largest in terms of its network span. Its development work began right after Bangladesh achieved independence, and has been justifiably acclaimed around the world, but without proper market linkages, even BRAC's initiatives could not be sustained. JOBS therefore launched a joint initiative with BRAC to provide training to two clusters of unskilled workers in Nilphamary and Rangpur. These severely impoverished people lacked the technical and entrepreneurial expertise needed to successfully make and market hand-made shoes, until JOBS taught both groups basic and advanced shoe-making skills in two year-long training programs in 2002 and 2003. To create market linkages for the aspiring micro-entrepreneurs, JOBS facilitated direct liaison between their shoe shops and lead buyers and wholesalers in Nilphamary and Rangpur, and in other districts nearby, including Dinajpur, Panchagarh, Lalmonirhat, Bogra, Kurigram, and Gaibandha. The number of people trained in the Nilphamary initiative grew from 30 at the beginning of the training to 62 in the final sessions; 30 more workers were trained in Rangpur. Advanced skill development training with both clusters will continue until May 2004, and JOBS continues to facilitate commercial



Women worker seen during the training session in Rangpur shoe cluster.

transactions and monitor the new market linkages between the micro-entrepreneurs and lead buyers and wholesalers. As a result of JOBS' work with these unskilled individuals, the hand-made shoe sector in Nilphamary and Rangpur is now sustainable, and will provide secure jobs for the individuals already trained and create new employment opportunities for their children. ■

Rajshahi Silk Fabrics Court Attention of French Consumers



JOBS facilitated training for workers of Shadhon Babu Silk House.

Historically, Adarsho Silk Industry, a traditional silk producer and wholesaler located in Rajshahi, has distributed its printed and dyed silk fabrics and sarees, made by artisans scattered throughout the region, to domestic markets in Rajshahi, Dhaka, and Khulna. Until recently, the firm was unable to take on large consignments for international markets because it lacked backward linkages to these markets and because its workers were not skilled in producing the design and color combinations preferred by foreign consumers.

Then the Adarsho entrepreneurs, with help from JOBS, formed a cluster of 26 producers, now known as the Shibgonj Silk Dying & Printing Cluster. Recently, JOBS facilitated a 30-day training session, led by foreign consultants, for members of the cluster. JOBS also established market linkages between the Adarsho cluster and the Shadhon Babu Silk House in Chapainawabganj district in Rajshahi and Silk Dynasty, a shop in Dhaka. Recently, Silk Dynasty agreed to purchase a sample order of Adarsho sarees worth Tk. 3, 12,500 (US\$ 5305) on behalf of a French buyer. The establishment of this new distribution channel will generate new employment opportunities for local silk artisans, open new markets for their products, and create sustainable business growth for the sector. ■

CNAP E-learning Program Prepares Students for 21st Century Jobs

The Cisco Networking Academy Program (CNAP) is an e-learning program that provides students with the technology skills essential for success in today's global economy. CNAP is a comprehensive, four semester course of study that trains students to design, build, and maintain complex computer networks and prepares them to achieve



Erika Hoffman-Kiess presenting on CISCO Network Programming.



CNAP class going on in RUET

industry-standard certifications recognized world-wide, including the Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) certificate. Since March 2003, when JOBS began serving as the Country Coordinator for CNAP in Bangladesh, the program has expanded from one academy with 30 graduates to eight academies with a total enrollment of over 500 students.

Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (RUET) started its first CNAP classes in the summer of 2003. Today, over 100 students are enrolled in the four sections at RUET, including 18 females - one of the highest rates of female participation in any of the eight active academies in the country. This month students embark on the second semester of the four semester course. ■

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