

Bangladesh's Handmade Paper Industry Benefits from JOBS' Multi-level Cluster Approach

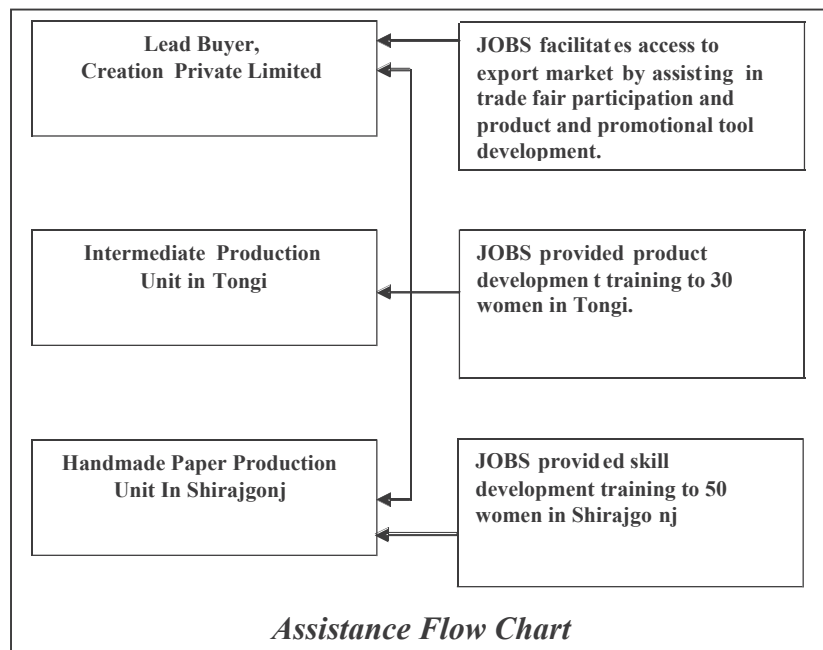
JOBS' work with Bangladesh's handmade paper industry provides a prime example of how the program's unique cluster concept fosters success at all levels of the economy, from simple village handicraft workers using age-old technologies to exporters selling the resulting products at gift fairs in sophisticated world capitals.

Unlike its neighbors, Nepal and Thailand, Bangladesh never formally developed its indigenous handmade paper industry beyond the efforts of a few individual artisans – until The JOBS Project recognized the potential of the sector, fueled by the growing demand for handmade paper and paper products around the world.

At the top of the three-tier cluster the Project developed, JOBS works with Creation Private Limited, the leading exporter of handmade paper from Bangladesh. At present almost 110 people are employed in Creation's two production units, many of them underprivileged women. Another 100 are expected join this work force by the end of 2003. Women working in the cluster now earn up to Tk 4,000 a month, depending on their skill level.

Besides creating job opportunities, Creation's production techniques protect the environment by using industrial and natural waste products, further reduce poverty by using traditional, labor intensive technologies, and take advantage of indigenous resources, including jute and plant-based dyes.

The bottom tier of the cluster is the primary raw material production unit in the remote village of Shirajgonj, where JOBS is training 50 women on the craft of handmade paper. Part of the paper they produce goes directly to the export market through Creation. The rest goes to Tongi, the middle



tier of the cluster, where 30 women are being trained by JOBS to craft a variety of products, including holiday cards, notebooks, picture frames, gift wrap, photo albums, and writing paper.

To consolidate the whole linkage, JOBS facilitates Creation's participation in major international trade fairs, such as the Birmingham Gift Fair, and provides expertise in the development of the firm's promotional brochures and digital catalogue.

After JOBS's intervention and assistance, Creation Private Limited exported US\$200,000 worth of handmade paper and paper products, while local sales amounted to almost US\$80,000 during Jan-Oct 2002.

To further develop the sector, JOBS will assist other lead buyers to participate in major trade fairs in the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, and Hong Kong. JOBS will also create additional production clusters to support the growing export demand. One has already been established with BRAC in Mymensingh. Two more will soon follow, one in Tangail and another in Mymensingh.

With these initiatives, JOBS expects the value of handmade paper exported from Bangladesh to reach US\$5million in 2003.



Handmade paper production cluster at Tongi